

Level 1 Coaching – Task 5: Developing Rider Feedback



Welcome

About the course

Welcome to this British Horseracing Authority eLearning course. This is part of a series of eLearning courses designed for those wishing to take the Level 1 Coaching Qualification in Racing. It is about developing rider feedback on horse performance.

Who is this for?

This course is for a Level 1 Coaching Assistant.

How long will this course take?

The course is **self-paced** and takes up to 60 minutes.

Who wrote the course

This course has been developed by the British Horseracing Authority.

Learning outcomes

About this course

By studying this course you will gain a knowledge and understanding of the importance of the roles and responsibilities of a Coaching Assistant (Level 1) including developing rider feedback techniques, including:

- Understanding the horse's paces and footfalls at walk, trot, canter and gallop
- Creating rider awareness of:
 - outline
 - rhythm
 - balance
 - impulsion
 - tempo
 - straightness
 - suppleness
 - connection
- Reporting on horse performance including methodology and communication techniques

The horse's paces

THE HALT

Although not technically a pace, it is helpful to understand the qualities of a good halt so that the horse can be observed or shown at its best in a balanced and calm manner.

At the halt, the horse must stand quite still and straight with his weight distributed evenly over all four legs. It should stand square, with the forefeet in line with each other and the back feet also in line. The horse should be calm, attentive and accepting of the rider's contact.



The horse's paces (continued)

THE WALK

In the walk, the horse places each foot on the ground independently so no two feet hit the ground at the same time. This is known therefore as a 'four time' beat. The rider should be able to feel and count the four beats. The beats should be in the same rhythm and the walk should be regular with a marching and purposeful gait. The horse should be calm and active.

The walk is often the first pace viewed by both rider and trainer, and much can be gained from observing the horse at walk. The horse should 'over track', where the horse's hind foot should pass over and land in front of the print left by the forefoot on the same side. A long over track can be a good indication of the power and reach in the hindquarters and so very important in the racehorse.

Whilst observing the horse in walk, attention should be paid to its athleticism; a swinging back, free shoulder, active quarters and elasticity in the pace.



The sequence to the way the horse places each foot on the ground is as follows:

- 1 left hind
- 2 left fore
- 3 right hind
- 4 right fore.

The horse's paces (continued)

THE TROT

The trot is a diagonal 'two time' pace, where the horse places its feet on the ground in diagonal pairs. This means there are two beats to every stride. The trot should appear regular, active and energetic without appearing to be hurried.

The horse springs from one diagonal pair of legs to the other with a moment of suspension, when all four legs are off the ground between each beat.



The sequence of the footfalls is:

- 1 left hind and right fore together
- 2 right hind and left fore together.

The horse's paces (continued)

THE CANTER

The canter is an important pace when training racehorses as it is the preparatory pace for the gallop: the racing pace. Canter is a 'three time' pace with three beats to each stride. The rider will feel, and be able to count, the three beats as well as the moment of suspension when all four feet are off the ground.

Within the canter, the rider should be able to recognise the 'leading leg' which is the foreleg that has the most reach. When riding in a circle, it is important that the inside foreleg is the leading leg to ensure the horse remains balanced.



The sequence of the footfalls when the left foreleg is leading is:

- 1 right hind
- 2 left hind and right fore together
- 3 left fore (the leading leg) followed by a moment of suspension when all four legs are briefly off the ground.

The horse's paces (continued)

THE GALLOP

The gallop is a 'four time' pace with a rapid four beats to every stride, with a moment of suspension when the horse pushes forward and covers the ground.

At the gallop, the horse's frame and outline will lengthen considerably from the canter.

As he increases speed, the stride will lengthen and the tempo of the pace will increase, but the horse should always remain in rhythm. The horse should work into the contact and remain in balance.



Again, like the canter, there is a leading leg. The sequence of footfalls with the left foreleg leading is:

- 1 right hind
- 2 left hind
- 3 right fore
- 4 left fore followed by a moment of suspension when all four legs are briefly off the ground.

The horse in action

Every horse will have their own natural gait and way of going. It is the role of the rider and trainer to work with these natural paces to ensure that the horse achieves its maximum performance. Factors to consider when developing and improving the paces include the following aspects.

Outline

The outline describes the profile or frame of the horse. It is important that a racehorse moves in an athletic, confident manner with an outline that leads to the longest stride and balanced movement.

The slightest deviation from the optimum outline can lead to restricted paces that can mean the difference between winning and losing a race. The outline of a racehorse will naturally differ from that of a performance horse in other disciplines such as showjumping or dressage. However, the outline of the racehorse dictates other qualities sought after in the paces and shouldn't be disregarded.



The horse in action (continued)

Rhythm

Rhythm is the regularity and evenness of the hoof beats. Loss of rhythm can affect many of the other qualities of the pace which could adversely affect performance in a race.

Balance

Balance in the horse means the correct distribution of its weight for the work it is doing. A horse typically carries about 60 percent of its weight over its front feet, but the natural balance will vary from horse to horse. It is important that the horse is taught to carry itself in balance, and that the rider remains in balance and harmony with the horse.

The rider's position will adjust according to the pace of the horse. When working a horse in canter or gallop, the rider will adopt a more forward seat as the centre of balance of the horse moves forward.



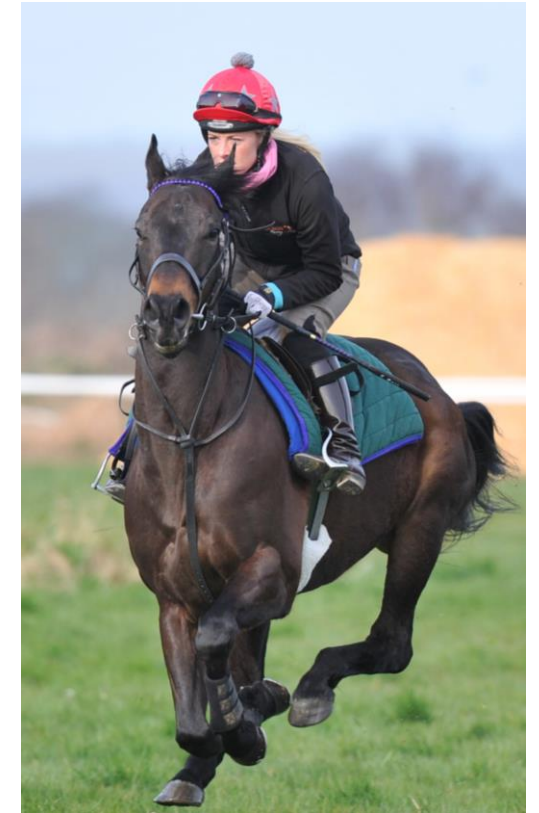
The horse in action (continued)

Impulsion

Impulsion is the energy and desire to go forward by the horse. Some horses are keen and have natural energy and enthusiasm, whilst others need to be encouraged by the rider. A horse moving forward with impulsion will be responsive to the rider's seat and leg, will be active and willing, have engagement of the hocks, and show elasticity in his paces. Impulsion should not be confused with speed, which is the rate at which the horse is covering the ground, rather than the energy with which it is moving.

Tempo

Tempo is the speed of the rhythm; the time it takes for the sequence of the footfalls to occur. The tempo of each pace should be consistent to help the horse remain in balance.



The horse in action (continued)

Straightness

In order to remain in balance a racehorse must be able to move directly forward, as if on railway tracks, with the hind foot on one side directly following the forefoot on the same side. It should be straight from the tip of nose to tail. The horse should also be able to bend throughout his body in a uniform way, again from nose to tail. With good training and riding, a horse can be taught to bend evenly on both sides, which will be of benefit at the faster paces, and enable him to race on both left-handed and right-handed tracks with equal success.



The horse in action (continued)

Suppleness

Athleticism is a key component of a racehorse's ability to succeed on the track. It should be free and swinging in its paces and move without tension or restriction. The whole of the horse's body and frame should be considered when assessing its suppleness, with the neck moving freely, open shoulder, loose back and swinging tail.

Connection

Means the horse accepts the aids willingly and without any tension. This describes the energy coming from the hindquarters working through a supple and swinging back into an accepting and elastic contact with the bit.



Reporting on horse performance

THE FEEDBACK PROCESS

The rider's feedback is vital, and a good rider who can give quality feedback is invaluable to a trainer. This will enable the trainer to make sound decisions about a horse's level of fitness, education and inform future training plans.

Coaches should encourage their riders to develop the analytical and communication skills to feedback on a horse's performance. The rider should be able to give a basic assessment of the horse's way of going and understand the significance of identifying a horse's strengths, qualities and areas for improvement.

They should be able to provide clear and concise feedback in a timely and appropriate manner.



Reporting on horse performance (continued)

When reporting on a horse's performance, riders should be encouraged to consider what information will be important to the trainer, owner or other connection.

Relevant information might include:

- The horse's balance, rhythm, straightness, suppleness and impulsion
- Was it better on one rein than the other
- How it coped with the exercise physically and mentally
- Was it suited to the ground conditions
- What were the positives of the performance
- What were the areas for improvement



Reporting on horse performance (continued)

Riders should think about the 'feedback sandwich'. This means that the rider will find something positive to say, followed by areas for improvement (or a negative comment), with a final positive comment.

For example: *This horse is well balanced with a good length of stride. It lacks confidence when working upsides which made it reluctant to pass other horses, so this is something we should work on. It worked well on the undulating conditions and appears to relish the soft going.*



Reporting on horse performance (continued)

When coaching riders it is helpful to give them a framework to develop their feedback. The 'ORBIT' acronym is a useful way of remembering key points of a horse's performance. This stands for:

- Outline
- Rhythm
- Balance/Bend
- Impulsion
- Tempo
- Speed



Reporting does not always have to be conducted face to face, although this is often the preferred method when the horse has just worked and both parties are together. If the trainer or owner is not present then a telephone call or message can be just as valued – and if there is an opportunity to send a short piece of video footage this is usually much appreciated.