

Any girl fortunate enough to ride has double joy—an exhilarating exercise that takes her over the countryside, and friendship with her horse.

—Girl Scout Handbook, 1940



Horseback Riding

Riding a horse is one of the most exciting things you can do. But ask any good horseback rider her secret to success and she'll say that *understanding* a horse is as important as learning to ride one. Get clued in to horses, and get ready to ride!

Steps

1. Know the basics of horseback riding
2. Take care of a horse and learn about safety
3. Prepare for your ride
4. Practice your ride
5. Go for a ride

Purpose

When I've earned this badge, I'll know what it takes to be a good rider—from understanding horse body language to controlling the horse's speed while I'm riding.

Made possible by a generous grant from the Elliott Wildlife Values Project



More to Explore

Not all horses are the same.

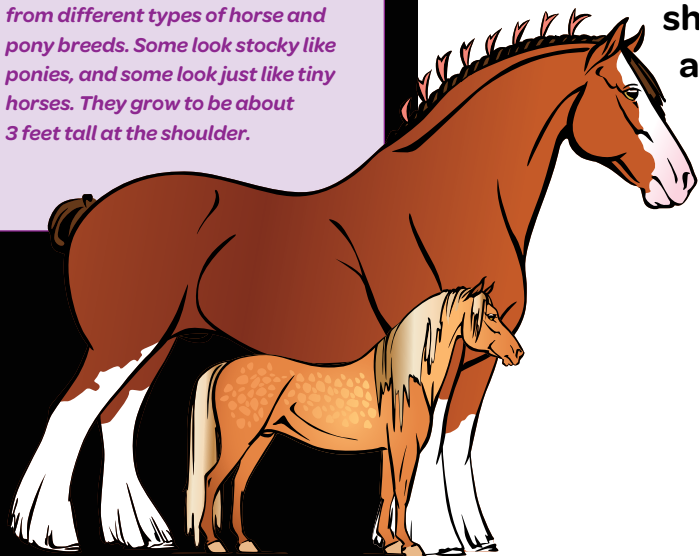
Different types of horses are called breeds.

Draft horses work on farms because they're strong enough to pull equipment. The ones at a racetrack? They're called **thoroughbreds**, known for their speed and spirit. Which breed will you be riding?

Three other fun ones to know:

- **American quarter horse**
Typically good tempered and popular for new riders
- **American paint horse**
Its coloring acts as camouflage
- **Miniature horse**
Originally bred as pets for children of royalty

Below, draft horse and miniature horse: Miniature horses were bred from different types of horse and pony breeds. Some look stocky like ponies, and some look just like tiny horses. They grow to be about 3 feet tall at the shoulder.



Before You Start

Be sure to:

- ▶ Let your camp counselor, troop volunteer, or a parent know you'll need to ride a horse in order to earn this badge.
- ▶ Find out where you can ride a horse. Is it a Girl Scout camp? An equestrian center, horse ranch, or private lesson?

STEP 1 Know the basics of horseback riding

You want to learn how to ride a horse. Start with the basics: riding styles—Western or English—what kind of gear you and your horse need, and how to talk like a rider.

To understand horseback riding, here's what you need to know:

- **The difference between Western- and English-style riding.** Find out which style you'll ride.
- **Types of horse riding equipment.** What are a saddle, saddlecloth, bridle, and bit? Find out how to make these comfortable for the horse and rider.
- **The best riding gear for you.** Learn about the type of pants (long are recommended to avoid pinching or scraping on the straps and buckles), shoes (boots or closed-toe shoes with a smooth sole and at least a half-inch heel to prevent feet from sliding through stirrups), and a safety helmet designed for horseback riding.



Grooming Tips

Horses love to be brushed! It makes them look and feel good. It helps circulate their blood, and it releases natural oils to protect their coats from wind and rain. It also gives you a chance to bond with them. Before grooming, make sure your horse is properly tied. Then:

- In circular motions, use a rubber currycomb to remove dry dirt and hair on the horse's body, not her head and legs.
- In short, flicking motions, use a dandy brush to remove mud and hard stains on her body only.
- Use a sponge to clean her nose and eyes.
- Use a mane comb to comb out the horse's mane and forelock.
- Use hoof picks to remove mud and stones from her hooves.
- Use a soft brush over her body. Be gentle around her head and face—they're sensitive!

Anatomy of a Horse

You will get to know a horse better if you understand how these parts work:



Horse Speak

What's your horse trying to tell you? Check out her facial expressions. Look at her ears, eyes, and mouth. Here's how a horse might say ...



▲ "I like you."

She's nibbling at your shoulder or hands while you groom or feed her.



▲ "I'm happy."

She has a soft look in her eyes. Her ears are facing forward. Her mouth and muscles are relaxed. She may let out a sigh.



▲ "I'm mad."

Her ears are pinned back. Her upper lip is curled. Her teeth are bared. She is stamping her feet. She's swinging her body to get away from anyone trying to control her.



▲ "I'm scared and nervous."

Her head and neck are held high. Her muscles are tense. She's trembling. Her tail is tucked against her back legs. She's grinding her teeth.



STEP 3 Prepare for your ride

Before you even begin your ride, you should know certain things, like how to get on and off your horse, not to mention how to tie her so she can't wander off.

To complete this step, learn how to:

- **Lead your horse.** What side should you be on? How close should you be to the horse? How are you holding the lead rope?
- **Mount and dismount your horse.** Find out how to get on and off your horse. Walk your horse to a mounting block if you use one.
- **Tie a horse.** After you ride, learn how to tie your horse, whether at ringside or in a stable.
- **Work with an adult to saddle and bridle a horse.** If your horse is already saddled, find out how to check the leather or nylon halter equipment that goes over her head and that is used to lead and tie a horse. Make sure it's strapped tight enough to be secure but not uncomfortable for the horse. Find out how to check the saddle—is it in the correct position and properly secured? Finally, check that the stirrups are adjusted to the right length so that your feet comfortably slide into the correct position.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

- Take part in horseback riding at camp.
OR 
- Take lessons at a horseback riding stable.
OR 
- Ask a local horseback-riding expert to give you lessons.

Get Fit to Ride

When you ride a horse, you'll be using muscles you don't use every day. Here are some tips for getting ready to ride:

Strengthen your thighs to help you sit tighter in the saddle.

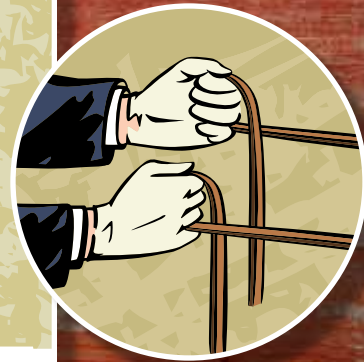
- Sit on a chair with your feet flat and a soccer ball between your knees.
- Squeeze the ball for 15 seconds and release. Repeat 10 times.

Improve your posture to help you sit straight in the saddle.

- Lie on your stomach.
- Push your body up until your arms are in a straight line from your shoulders to your wrists and you're on the balls of your feet. (If it's too hard, keep your knees on the ground!)
- Keep your back straight and your stomach muscles tight. Hold for 15 seconds. Repeat 5 times.

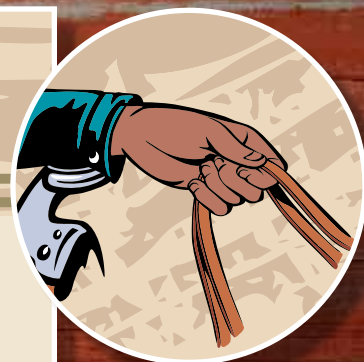
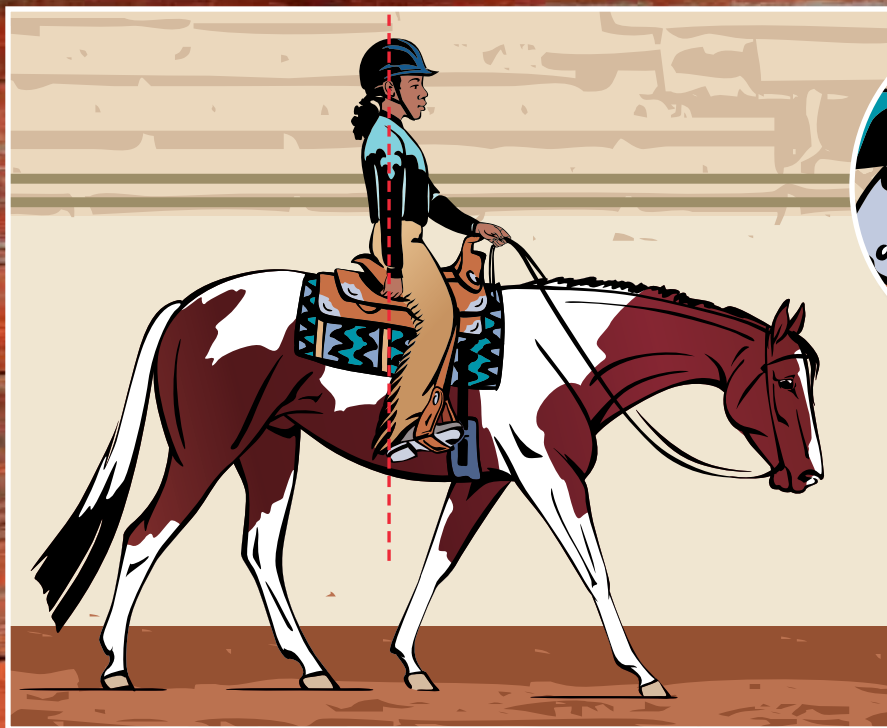
Form Good Riding Habits

What it means to have good form: Keep your back straight, your heels lower than your toes, and the balls of your feet resting on the stirrup irons. Your upper shoulders should be relaxed. You should have a light L shape in your elbows, and keep your arms close to your body.



English-style

Holding one rein in each hand gives a rider better control of stopping and turning.



Western-style

Holding the reins with one hand became popular because cowboys could use their other hand to herd cattle.



Ring and Trail Safety

Always...

- Ride with another person around.
- Try to keep a horse length between other horses.
- Say it out loud if you make a move (like “passing” or “on your left”).

Along a trail:

- Know the local wildlife.
- Watch for low branches and holes.
- Walk up and down steep hills.
- Avoid riding on roads with traffic.

In a ring:

- Make sure gates are closed.
- Ride slow on inside, fast on outside.



STEP 5 Go on a ride

If you're a beginner, it may take a few lessons to get comfortable on a horse. Once you have the basics down, though, it's time to ride! You can ride your horse in a riding ring or a trail—no matter where you go or what level you are, you'll experience the ultimate thrill of riding!

To complete this step, learn to do the following, which will help you become a skilled rider:

- **How to walk your horse with control.** Keep your walk smooth, and if your horse slows, know how to nudge it with your heels. What commands are you using? How do you get the horse to turn left or right using your reins and leg squeezes?
- **How to trot with ease.** Once you're comfortable with walking your horse, try a trot. This may not happen at your first or even second lesson. If you're a first-time rider, your instructor will know when you're ready.
- **How to control your horse's speed.** If you're advanced enough to go into a canter or even a gallop, do so. If not, walk, trot, slow, and stop your horse on command.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

- Take part in horseback riding at camp.
OR
- Take lessons at a horseback riding stable.
OR
- Ask a local horseback-riding expert to give you lessons.



- ◆ Always walk—not run—up to a horse. Approach from the side, not directly in front or behind her. Introduce yourself by holding out the back of your hand for the horse to smell.
- ◆ Make sure there's someone experienced with you when you're caring for a horse.
- ◆ Sometimes a horse may buck or rear if she is uncomfortable. Ask the trainer to help you check the saddle fit and bit size for tightness that could make the horse sore. Also, be aware of any riding mistakes you might be making. Are you keeping a light, even tension on your reins? Horses can tell if you're nervous and will get nervous, too. Try to relax and stay confident!



Add the Badge to Your Journey

In Get Moving, Sample Session 3, you observe animals in their natural setting and talk about animals, energy, and movement. What better way to do this than with horses? Jot your thoughts down about what you see in a stable and in a riding ring. How is movement necessary to a horse's survival? What happens when a horse doesn't get exercise?

Now that I've earned this badge, I can give service by:

- Sharing safety tips for horseback riding with Daisies and Brownies.
- Volunteering at a horse shelter, a rescue place for neglected or abandoned horses.
- Organizing a horse grooming and care day at local stable or ranch to do with my troop.



I'm inspired to:



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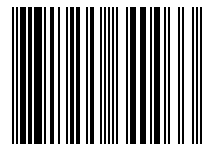
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