

SAMPLE LESSON TOPICS

The following collection of sample lessons was written by USDF Instructor Trainer Program Faculty and Examiners. The individual writing styles of the authors have been preserved. These sample lessons are intended as a body of work that reflects the authors' strong belief that the best way to develop knowledgeable, effective students who create relaxed and correct horses is through the systematic use of the Pyramid of Training.

It should also be said that there is no one way to teach anything! One's skill and depth of teaching continue to grow over a lifetime, and often the difficult horse or rider stimulates teachers to develop further exercises and approaches. Once one understands and is able to use the principles of the Pyramid of Training it is always possible to assess the relative success of any new or different exercise.

It has been said that we teach that which we want to know. But also, that we cannot teach what we do not know! Clearly the lifelong process of studying dressage suits that concept well.

Lesson Topic: The Half Halt

Definition

"The half-halt is the hardly visible, almost simultaneous, coordinated action of the seat, the legs and the hand of the rider, with the object of increasing the attention and balance of the horse before the execution of several movements or transitions between gaits or paces. In shifting slightly more weight onto the horse's quarters, the engagement of the hind legs and the balance on the haunches are facilitated for the benefit of the lightness of the forehand and the horse's balance as a whole." [USEF Rule Book DR108]

"The half-halt is a call to attention to prepare the horse for the next command of his rider." [Classical Training of Horse and Rider, p 40]

"The half-halt is a combination of your driving aids plus your bending aids plus a rein of opposition sustained for a period of about three seconds." [Dressage Insights: Excerpts from Experts, p 35]

Gymnastic Purpose

"In shifting slightly more weight onto the horse's quarters, the engagement of the hind legs and the balance on the haunches are facilitated for the benefit of the lightness of the forehand and the horse's balance as a whole." [USEF Rule Book DR108]

"Half-halts are the tools that you use to bring your horse to a more perfect state of balance." [Dressage Insights: Excerpts from Experts, p 35]

"Half-halts are used when riding a transition from one gait to another. They are used to shorten or adjust the strides within a gait. They are used to alert the horse prior to a new exercise or movement. They are also used to improve or maintain the horse's collection and carriage within a movement." [Principles of Riding, p 97]

"It can be employed to shorten the stride, improve the contact and collection, and give notice to the horse that an exercise requiring greater proficiency is about to be demanded. The half-halt will help the horse to carry himself better and take a lighter contact with the bit. It may be used as a corrective, especially with a horse that is inclined to lie heavily on the reins." [Classical Training of Horse and Rider, p 40]

Aids

“The rider places more weight on his seat bones by tightening his back muscles, pushes the horse forward with his legs, and uses a carefully measured asking or non-yielding rein aid followed with minimum delay by a yielding rein.” [*Principles of Riding*, p 97-98]

“The same aids are employed as for a full halt but to a lesser degree and are discontinued the moment the horse has responded.” [*Classical Training of Horse and Rider*, p 40]

Qualities Desired

The forward-driving aids should always be dominant in the half-halt, as it cannot work without them. It can only fulfill its purpose if the hind legs are asked to come closer to the horse’s center of gravity, and if the horse is pushed on a straight line into both, and on circles into the outside rein.

Common Faults

“A half-halt performed with a pulling hand and no driving of seat and legs is more damaging than helpful.” [*Practical Dressage Manual*, p 43]

“In the beginning there can be confusion, especially if the rider doesn’t have very sensitive hands. Too much leg will make the horse pull and lean on the reins. Too much seat will make him hollow his back and resist right through his body.” [*Dressage for the Young Rider*, p 95]

Training Advice

The success of this movement depends on whether the horse is far enough along in his training to be responsive to the aids of the rider. A young horse that has not yet reached that level of training will not be able to comply.

“In the beginning I like to teach the horse and rider to develop the half-halt by slowly developing the strength of the horse through transitions, such as trot-walk transitions. I start by doing 5 or 6 walk steps and back to the trot and again 5 or 6 walk steps and back to the trot. It is important that the horse stay balanced through the downward transition and keeps a clear walk into the transition back up to the trot. As this is obtained, I try to shorten the number of steps and work towards one step of walk. Then it seems that the rider has the correct aids to close and drive under the horse’s hind legs without stopping the forward motion.” [*Dressage Insights: Excerpts from Experts*, p 29]

The degree of emphasis with which the half-halt is employed should be geared to the sensitivity of the horse. “There are many degrees of half-halts and the requirements should be increased as the training of the horse progresses. A green horse should not be asked for much engagement, and will probably resist the bit in the beginning. Do not hang on stubbornly; inhale-exhale, that is the length of a half-halt. If the half-halt does not work, repeat it.” [*Practical Dressage Manual*, p 43]

Any new movement requested of the horse should be introduced with a half-halt. This technique makes the horse more alert.

“When a rider understands the connection of hand to hind leg, and leg into hand, they will be able to make a more effective half-halt.” [*Dressage Insights: Excerpts from Experts*, p 33]