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# TEACHING DRILL

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## Teaching Drill

A drill master must play many roles; part trainer, part coach, part psychologist and several other things. Regardless of your years of experience you will never cease to learn new things as a drill master. Learning to pass along the needed experience and skills to a team and keeping an eye on the overall picture is a never ending, always changing responsibility. The misconception is that it is easy to sit in a position telling people what to do. Well that part might be easy, but deciding what to tell them to do, how to get it done correctly and getting them to want to do it willingly are the more difficult parts.

## The Team

### *Three Traits of High Scoring Teams:*

- **Precision – Spacing and alignment is first and foremost in importance.**
- **Ride Tight – Closer distance adds difficulty, tighter spacing between riders gives a cohesive appearance.**
- **Speed – Lastly comes speed. Increase speed in one appropriate maneuver of your drill then expand to other maneuvers as suitable.**

### *Actions of Effective Teams:*

1. **The team must have a clear goal** expressed so concisely that everyone knows when the objective has been met and that the members can tackle given their level of knowledge with effort and practice.
2. **The team must have a results-driven structure.** The team should practice in a manner that produces results.
3. **The team must have unified commitment.** This doesn't mean that team members must agree on everything. It means that all individuals must be directing their efforts towards the goal.
4. **The team must have a collaborative climate.** It is a climate of trust produced by honest, open, consistent and respectful behavior. With this climate teams perform well...without it, they fail.
5. **The team must have high standards that are understood by all.** Team members must know what is expected of them individually and collectively. Vague statements such as "positive attitude" and "demonstrated effort" are not good enough.
6. **The team must receive external support and encouragement.** Encouragement and praise work just as well in motivating teams as it does with individuals. Openly encourage and support one another. Be slow to criticize and quick to commend. You critique a team to correct, to help, to improve - not to punish.
7. **The team must have principled leadership.** Teams need someone to lead the effort. Team members must know that the drill master has the position because they have good leadership skills and are working for the good of the team. The team members will be less supportive if they feel that the team leader is putting him/herself above the team, achieving personal recognition or otherwise benefiting from the position. "You handle things. You work with people."

**3 Ways People Learn:** Try to incorporate all three when working with a team.

- **Visually** – Show them how. 60% of all people are primary visual.
- **Auditory** – Tell them how, explain it.
- **Kinesthetically** – Actually have them do it.

## **Practice**

A more efficient and productive practice is what will turn your team from good to great.

- Four Expectations for a team practice:

### **1. Promptness**

- Be on time. Unless there is an emergency. It is disrespectful to be late.
- If you are 10 minutes late and there are 12 people on your team you have wasted not only your 10 minutes but 10 minutes of each rider. That adds up to 120 minutes or 2 hours of missed practice time.
- Make it clear when and where practice starts. Do you need everyone in the arena ready to ride (tack previously adjusted) at a specific time? Do you start practice on the ground with discussions or walkthroughs? As John Wooden said “Discipline yourself and others won’t need to.”

### **2. Drama Free Zone**

- Leave your drama, troubles and stress at the gate on your way in. You may pick it up on the way out if you choose.
- Don’t be disagreeable just because you disagree. If you want a strong cohesive team you must develop a respect for the team that goes beyond yourself interests.
- Keep our commonality (drill & the team) the focus of the team to remain in sync and keep a harmonious team. Leave relationships, issues and anything unrelated to drill and the team goal outside the team. You to see a team where you cannot tell who is best of friends outside of practice.

### **3. Focus**

- Are your practices more like a social hour or a serious athletic team practice?
- Demand full focus in the arena. It is usually a lack of focus that leads to accidents and dangerous situations.
- “Excellence is not an act, but a habit.” is a quote I like to refer to. Excellent teams (teams that are consistently at a high level) practice every time at that high level.
- Don’t get together for a social/practice hour and expect to be an excellent team.

### **4. Teamwork**

- Learning to be a good teammate and working as a team is a learned skill that takes practice, effort and desire.

- Teamwork is defined in Webster's New World Dictionary as "a joint action by a group of people, in which each person subordinates his or her individual interests and opinions to the unity and efficiency of the group."
- Members should feel a sense of ownership towards their role in the group because they committed themselves to goals they helped create. We all know that it is virtually impossible to get 12 women all agree that one particular outfit is the best choice so realize everyone must compromise for the team to reach its potential.
- Find the best way, not insisting on your own way. If you choose to talk negatively about team mate you don't think is up to snuff skill wise or have a negative attitude you are the team's greater weakness.

## ***Warm-up***

Your practice plan should include a productive way of warming up your horses. What skill drill do you want to use to warm up your horses, get minds focused, and get the team working together.

Your practice should have a plan- Practice should be structured in advance to use your horses in the most efficient manner. You and your horse are one athlete, you are the brain he is the body. Plan your practice to still be productive even when giving your horse a break.

Whoever is the one planning the practice should have established goals for the practice in mind. What is it you want to achieve this practice and how are you going to best get it done.

Walking through the drill – Because of older horses & limited arena time and alternate riders riding in I have my teams walk through a drill on the ground to save the horses while we are warming up our brains. It is a good way to refresh people's memory of a new drill or to introduce in an alternate rider into a place they have not ridden in. It is also an easy way to communicate new maneuvers to a team.

Sample Plan:

5. Walk through drill on foot
6. Mount up & Warm-up
7. Skills work
8. Circle up – walk off/cool down horses while discussing what you just did, progress made etc.
9. Work on maneuvers
10. Circle up to discuss what you just worked on
11. Work on full drill
12. Circle up to discuss progress, potential improvement, etc.

Warm-up drill Examples: Make up your own mini drill for warm-up.

Figure 8's are good because they circle each direction and have an interchange, grids which we will go over for spacing and alignment. Try to cover tracking, alignment, spacing, timing and teamwork.

## ***Rider Inner Dialog***

Every rider should have their own dialog going on in their head. This dialog reminds them what distance they should have, where they should be looking, what direction to turn, etc. Develop your dialog from the beginning of learning the drill. The dialog should be started by the drill master at the first practice. This dialog will become automatic and you will be able to rely on it to maintain consistency to your performances. Drill start dialog might be “Deep breath in, hold, let out, equitation check, one horse spacing, dress with partner, cue for ½ right. Turn ½ right same time as partner goes ½ left, look across at partner”. Your dialog should remain constant with every ride through the drill.

## **SKILLS**

### ***Vertical Spacing***

Vertical spacing or distance is perhaps the single most important skill in drilling. It is also one of the hardest & tedious skills to master. Vertical spacing should be determined by the requirements of your maneuver and the ability of your team. It may also be influenced by the size of the arena and the number of riders on your team. A large team riding in a small arena may ride with considerably closer spacing than a small team in a large arena. In general difficulty points are achieved for riding with closer spacing, however if you have a small team you made want to increase spacing during some portions of your drill to have your team ride “big” to fill out the arena. A novice or less experienced team may want to ride with longer spacing to avoid collisions at the beginning and slow decrease the spacing as skills improve.

Regardless of what distances you choose for each maneuver the key to higher judges’ points is that every rider knows what the distance is supposed to be during each maneuver and that everyone’s perception of that distance is the same. Judges do not know what the distance you intend is, but they do know immediately if everyone has the same vertical spacing.

A key to maintaining spacing during gait changes or gait adjustments is everyone making the adjustment to the new gait at the same time. When picking up a new gait use a whistle command, so everyone knows to change gait at the exact same time. You cannot wait for the person in front of you to make the adjustment and have it trickle all the way down the line. Everyone must move together. This takes real teamwork to master. You may want to choose a long whistle for slowing the gait and a quick whistle to increase the gait.

The transitions on how you change from one spacing to another during a drill is critical to maintaining consistent spacing. When creating your drill choreography identify where and how spacing transitions will occur seamlessly.

The average length of a horse is 8 ½’. This 8 ½’ is what we will refer to as 1 horse spacing or (1H). 2 horse (2H) is 17’, 3 horse (3H) 25 ½’, 4 horse (4H) 34’, every team member must know what each distance looks like from the back of their horse. Learning what distances you are using in a program and exactly what they look like on your horse is imperative. Review

your drill and pre-determine the distances you are using in your team drill and practice those repeatedly. To establish what one horse spacing looks like on your horse put cones every 17' and have everyone line up with their horses nose at a cone, or line up in a single file line nose to tail then have every other horse side pass out a few feet or just line up in an offset single file nose to tail line.

Choose vertical spacing drills to review at practice. Spend more time at beginning of season then scale back and focus more on drill when every rider is proficient on knowing their spacing.

- Team assignment - Assign a distance to every maneuver and transition in your drill. Call out what that spacing is during practice until everyone knows it and has it!

### ***Horizontal Spacing***

The common distance between riders in units of greater than one is, knee-to-knee, legs lightly touching. Some maneuvers like suicide charges, fans, etc. require riders separate. Whatever the horizontal spacing you choose for a maneuver it must be consistent among all riders. If you have even one horse on your team that will not ride tight in to another horse and you must use that horse, you will be better off separating your spacing for other riders to a spacing the one horse is comfortable with. Judges can deduct considerable points under horizontal spacing and even horsemanship, if all riders are tight then there is one gap.

You may also choose to ride spread out to make a small team appear larger by using more of the arena space. Judges tend to appreciate tight spacing and reward it with points. Wear kneepads in practice if needed and maybe change out nice stirrups for cheap practice ones to learn to ride tight. Riding with legs touching lets you know by feel that you are aligned, if your legs are aligned and everyone is sitting up straight your bodies are aligned as well.

Riding at a lope and turning tightly into lines without crashing into one another takes practice. Learn when to straighten your horse as you come in to avoid horses crossing legs, never come together with your horses' bodies angled or you will get legs clipped or tangled. You must learn to cue your horse early, make the turn smoothly, and float lightly together. Practice in a column of pairs going up the center of the arena at a lope. At the center split one lead rider going right and one to the left with their lines following them. Ride down the long sides of the arena then come back together to go back up the center again. Concentrate on coming together tightly and smoothly with your horses' body straight when you come together so legs are not crossed. Increase your pairs to fours and split off in pairs and come back in at lope into fours. Increase the unit size from six then to 8's depending on the size of your team.

Next start again in pairs up the center but keep vertical spacing close (1H). Split at center but this time as the front pair comes together have the riders directly behind move up on the outsides of the front pair into a four. When comfortable try larger units until you can fold two single file lines into a single line abreast smoothly and tightly.

Another great training aid is to form two side by side circles with the center two coming together in a pair before traveling back out in their own circle. Try a clover leaf with four circles touching coming together in one pair then another.

## ***Alignment***

**Alignment refers to both the vertical and horizontal alignment in maneuvers and or transitions. Lines must always be straight whether abreast or in a column. Alignment in addition to timing and spacing are the keys to precision.**

### ***Vertical Alignment***

Vertical alignment is achieved by the lead rider going straight without swerving along their intended path. Every rider in the column behind them must follow directly in their footsteps. This is tracking. In a straight line up the arena from behind you should only see the back of the last rider. You may be tracking perfectly but your line may not be straight. This is achieved by the lead rider accurately picking a point on the opposite side of the arena and heading straight towards it and everyone behind tracking. During interchanges riders may flare out to one side or the other to adjust timing, Do Not Do This! Over shooting turns is another prevalent problem. Circles often tend to drift because of not tracking and figure 8's are counted off when interchange spot shifts and circles drift.

### ***Over Shooting Turns***

When you pick up a lope and make a right or left turn people behind naturally seem to start the turn where the lead rider's line ends up, which results in going past the desired line and having to pull back in. We call this overshooting the turn. Riders must start their turn earlier depending on the flexibility of their horse and end up their furthest point out straight into the tracking line of the lead rider. Playing follow the leader around the arena with the leader making several turns while the following riders practice turning directly into the correct line of travel.

### ***Horizontal Alignment***

Horizontal alignment is what sometimes is referred to in its military term as being "Dressed". It is the straight line of bodies across the entire unit. For horizontal alignment, start knee-to-knee. Riders sit up straight. A person at the side should just see the body of one rider. Riders look right and left to keep line straight. With practice you will feel that straight line like a straight metal rod running in one shoulder and out the other and through the next rider throughout the entire line. This can be simulated by everyone placing their right hand on the left shoulder of the rider to their right. This is referred to as

an “arm bar”. Practice riding around in your line circling, turning, etc. while in your arm bar position.

### ***Check Points***

Establish where each person is supposed to be looking during each maneuver. The more checkpoints in a maneuver the better it will look if everyone does it. Let’s look at just a simple unit 360-degree circle I often call a 4-point turn. To start have the team in pairs riding up a long fence and have them all perform a unit 360 circle on a whistle. Now start again have them stop, have them watch the front pair and have them do a 90 degree turn and stop and look to see if they are aligned all the way down the entire line of pairs. Have them turn another 90 degrees while switching to look at what was the end pair and stop, they should be aligned on a column of pairs one directly in track behind one another. Have them switch back to looking at the lead pair and turn another 90 and stop back in an abreast line. Finally have them do one more 90 back to the fence and back in a line of pairs tracking directly behind the pair ahead of them. Now have them walk up the fence again and have them do the same thing on a whistle but with a check pause instead of stopping fully. Watch the difference in the performance from the initial circle when they know where they are supposed to be looking each step of the way.

- Team assignment – review your drill and determine all the checkpoints for each maneuver. This is tedious but very important that everyone knows exactly where they should be looking to at each moment. This may be done on the ground in a walkthrough.

### **Timing**

Learning to watch other team members and make sure you are all at the desired place at the correct time takes a lot of practice. Interchanges, also called crosses, are a great tool to get everyone looking at each other. When starting to learn common maneuvers make sure everyone learns the maneuvers’ name and the distance required to perform them safely. Timing in drill is critical to performing your drill safely. Most drill accidents occur because someone’s timing is off. Work on your team’s timing every time your team meets. Like every sport out there, a good solid foundation in the basics can make all the difference. Single file crosses, figure 8’s and other crossing maneuvers are great timing exercises and should be included in your warm up section of the practice. Every rider should know where they are aiming to cross and are they aiming to pass right behind the butt of the horse they are crossing with or the center of the space, this will depend on your spacing and must be known by the rider for each maneuver.

## **Riding the Drill**

### **1. Partner & Counterpart**

In almost every pattern move you will have a partner, a counterpart or both. Once a rider is trained to constantly watch for her partner or counterpart, spacing will be less of a problem and riders are less likely to find themselves “lost”.

1. If there are 12 riders doing a circle, rider #1 will have rider #7 as their counterpart, rider #2 will have rider #8 and so on. If you will find your counterpart in this move and be exactly opposite, you can see where their spacing is and judge your own accordingly. If everyone is doing this your circle will be perfect.
2. If there are two lines going the same direction along the rail with six riders in each line, you will obviously look across to your partner to judge your spacing. You can see their spacing and if you line up with your partner, and everyone else does the same, your line spacing will be perfect.
3. Leaders need to be constantly watching their partners so that they are always opposite of them, turning together and keeping their spacing and timing exact. They must judge their line by the opposite line, knowing everyone is watching their partner/counterpart and acting accordingly to set the correct pace for the next move. As other riders pick up the lead, they must continue to watch their partner/other leader/counterpart. Only in this way can exact spacing be maintained through the entire drill routine.
4. New riders to a drill team are usually anxious about their position and do not always know when or where they are supposed to be. By starting from the beginning to train all riders to watch for their partners and /or counterparts, the pattern moves will be easier to learn and safer to execute.

### **2. Awareness**

Awareness is the ability to know where you are in relation to your partner/counterpart, as well as everyone else, and adjust yourself accordingly. Being “aware” of where you are and “adjusting” can be tricky. The #1 rule in riding any drill is to ride your position and let everyone else do the same. This rule must be stressed over and over because new/novice riders don’t really know how to adjust themselves and then riders begin to blame each other when things get out of hand. So now that we have everyone riding their position, we are going to start telling them to be “aware” and adjust. This is just taking experience up another learning step. If you have a drillmaster outside of the drill, they should be the one to keep riders in check about riding their positions and pointing out where adjustments need to be made.

1. Leaders: Leaders cannot merely lead the pack and hope everyone follows. So how do leaders adjust while riding their position? When you are traveling in a line you can usually see your partner/counterpart somewhere else in the arena doing a mirror image of what you are doing. What does their line look like? Are they together? Are you the leaders together? If leader “A” is even with leader “B” and her line looks good (spacing and speed), then leader “A” should be able to assume that their own line looks the same inasmuch as everyone should be watching their partner/counterpart just as the leaders are doing. However, if leader “A” sees that leader “B” is ahead and her line is with her, she should increase her speed to bring herself even. The rest of the line will follow, and as they, too, are watching to be equal, the lines will soon match. As leader “B” is also watching, she will slow down just a bit and allow leader “A” to catch up. So, both leaders are riding their position and adjusting. It is all checks and balances and it takes time to

get leaders to where they can accomplish this smoothly and without throwing off the timing.

Leaders must know where they are going, what is coming next and adjust accordingly. They must know that if they are going to “fold in” ahead that the lines will have to become “offset”, and the spacing increase to allow the other line to fold in between their line. The leaders set the pace and work off the opposite line according to what is going to happen next.

One other thing leaders must always remember is that what they do everyone else will generally do. They must be mindful that a fast adjustment of their part can either jam up the whole line and cause bumping and/or broken gaits, or they can string out the line and lose end riders because of too much speed. In general, the lead riders must know if they are going into a section that the team is building up to a larger unit they must slow up some and if the team is breaking down or trying to obtain more distance they must speed up. The intricacies of learning to ride in the lead takes a lot of experience to make your team look the best they can.

2. Line Riders: These are the riders that are in the middle of the pack. It's not always an easy place to be as you can sometimes get involved in a “see-saw” motion, i.e. slowing down, speeding up slowing down, in order to keep the spacing and timing. This is where the ability to rate or adjust your speed without breaking gait is very important. But just as leaders must know what they are doing, line riders cannot merely follow like sheep. While it is true they do not have the pressure of leading, they cannot fall asleep either. Nothing looks worse than perfect spacing between the first two or three horses then a big gap or no space at all in the middle and then good spacing at the end. Line riders must be aware of what they are doing and while they do not have the freedom to make adjustments for everyone, they are expected to be watching their partner/counterpart and be as equal as possible. Line riders also need to know what is coming up next to anticipate a lead change or know if they will soon have to speed up or slow down. Also, leaders have been known to go off course and the line riders must carry on the correct course until the lead riders gets back into position. Don't just follow the flags, know where you are going.
3. End Riders: Those individuals riding the tail end really must be watching everything. They usually see what everyone else is doing and they must be one step ahead or they will look like they are always playing “catch-up”. End riders usually get the most extreme changes in speed during the building up and breaking down of units or hurrying to get up there only to slam on the breaks for a pivot in a line crack the whip.
4. All Positions: In some drills a rider may be a lead, line, and end rider all in one drill, and need to make adjustments accordingly. If your entire team carries American flags it is easy to switch around lead riders. If you carry one or two Americans, a State and Club flags your lead riders will remain constant for the integrity of your flag protocol.

5. Specific Moves: There is more to riding the drill than just knowing what the moves are. Most maneuvers involve the awareness of alignment to look good. Take circles, circles are not always “circles”. When you have a circle of 4 it must really be a square to be a circle. Riders 1 and 3 are directly across from each other, as are riders 2 and 4. So to have a circle you must really have a square. When you get into higher numbers, riders will still have a counterpart within the circle, (unless you ride with an odd number of riders) and they should always be aware of her place in the circle.
6. Individual Judgment: This is a tough one. You are always expected to ride your position, but somehow if several others are out of line and you are in line, the whole looks bad. So, there are times when you must make an individual judgment call on what to do. Suppose you are coming in for a company front and you are at the end. You know you are in the right position, but the rest of the line stops a bit early and you are 5’ from the next horse. You don’t simply think, “well I am right, the rest is wrong, it’s their problem”. You move over and make everyone look good. Awareness = Teamwork.

Riding as part of a drill team is more than just “follow the leader” and /or “doing your own thing”. Learning to adjust comes with time and the experience of knowing when you can get away with it and when it is better to leave things alone. It will always be a judgment call – sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn’t. Just remember, when you do something that may take you out of position, chances are no one else will know what you are doing, and you could cause a real mess or endanger horses or riders. Your best bet is to ride your position and take one performance at a time.

7. Safety: Safety of horses and riders must always be the number one priority while drilling. Sometimes you will have to bail out of your position to make way for another rider that is out of position or has a horse or tack issue. Interchanges can be very dangerous if one line is behind and they are hauling to catch up but don’t quite make it. Evasive actions must be taken to prevent collisions even if you are in your correct position. Your team should also have a “safety word” that anyone can call in an emergency that brings everyone on your team to an immediate halt. An emergency may not be seen by everyone, so anyone that sees it must call the halt. We use “Troop Halt” and it is firmly engrained in every one of our rider’s heads, you may choose “Team Halt” or something similar. You need to define “emergency” as a situation where horse and /or rider is endangered. A rider out of position is not an emergency unless they are going to cause a collision. We have experienced everything from horse problems, to riders coming off, broken tack, to a rattlesnake in the arena.