

Alice Trindle Presents:

Developing a Willing Partnership

1. **Ground Skill Maneuvers**
2. **Attitude & Movement**
3. **Developing the Dance**
4. **Round Pen Logic**
5. **Work-in-hand**
6. **Posture**
7. **Lariat Use**
8. **Long Lines Driving**
9. **Shoulder-in Posture**
10. **Half-Pass Posture**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Alice Trindle was born on a ranch in eastern Oregon, the only daughter in a family of five brothers. She learned to ride behind the back of the saddle holding on to her brother's belt loops. In the past 15 years Alice has continued her relationship with horses, and had the opportunity to study with several true horsemen such as Tom Dorrance, Ray Hunt, Dennis Reis, and Bettina Drummond. She conducts clinics in Oregon, Washington, California, and Idaho, and offers multi-day horsemanship retreats at her ranch in eastern Oregon.

Ground Skill Maneuvers

Clinic #1 in a series of ten

Northwest Horse Source in collaboration with Alice Trindle of T&T Horsemanship is pleased to present a series of articles to aid aspiring riders on the journey toward improved communication with horses. Similar to a clinic setting, the articles will detail a step-by-step approach. Riders will learn specific exercises to enhance the partnership with their horse regardless of discipline or level of performance.

Balanced & Rhythmic Ground Work

One of the concepts the horses have shared with me is the reality that we can never get too good at our ground skill maneuvers. Whether it be at the end of our 12 ft. lead on the halter, or in the snaffle bit while accomplishing work-in-hand, our success in the saddle is greatly enhanced by our graceful abilities on the ground. As we prepare for spring riding, I'd like to review some basic ground skills with a critical eye on our ability to accomplish these tasks with rhythm, balance, and a soft flow.

It is important that we start any lesson with a mindfulness towards a "Horseman's Protocol."

"Horseman's Protocol"

- Become Present
- Think & Visualize
- Focus, which Prepares your Posture
- Allow & Reward

At times I think we forget that this protocol is equally important for ground skill maneuvers as it is for riding.

So our first ground skill is for the human... Take a deep breath, get yourself emotionally centered, then visualize yourself & the horse accomplishing these ground skill maneuvers.

(Note: Try these skills with a horseman's halter, at the end of a 12 ft. lead, then progress to a snaffle bit in the work-in-hand positioning.)

Forward – Driving on a Circle:

Basic Maneuver – The horse flows around the human straight on a circle, as if they were on a railroad track with the outside feet on the outside rail, and the inside pair of feet tracking up on the inside rail. The human walks a perfect circle, always engaged & mentally riding every step, every movement, every balance.

How to Accomplish – Send your horse around you on a circle. Envision a round pen on the outside of you, whether there is one there or not. Focus your attention and energy on the horse's inside eye, then shoulder, then rib cage & hip as he moves off and around you. It will help to open your body, as if opening a door, to point the direction you would like the horse to move. Close, support,

and drive with the shoulder and hip that is towards the outside of the circle. Move your toes, belly button, and energy on a line that connects to a place on the horse just about where the back cinch would hang. Don't get too close!

Balance - Horse is slightly arched to the inside of the circle, eyes and ears seeking direction of travel, shoulders balanced, and feet are tracking up as if they were on a railroad track.

Rhythm - Depends on the gait... At the walk a good steady four beat or march; At the trot a steady two-beat or Irish gig; At the canter a flowing 3-beat or waltz, as if they were going up-hill.

Transitions - Try to accomplish transitions up and down in gait without having the horse or you pulling on the lead. Keep the horse's shoulders up and balanced. Don't forget to breathe! Prepare your mind before the transitions.

Visualize - See yourself riding the horse and think about the aids you might use to remind him to keep his shoulders up, lift his belly and back, and carry a softness. Use your body positioning, arms/hands, or tools such as the whip or stick to send energy to those body parts that might be falling in or collapsing down. Try to avoid using the hand on the lead rope to lift or drive; rather, check your body positioning and focus.



Turn on the Forehand:

Basic Maneuver - The inside hind foot crosses under the belly of the horse, with the movement flowing from the inside hind towards the outside shoulder, and then a balancing up on the outside hind foot - there is little forward movement.

How to Accomplish - First, try this maneuver from a stand still, and then add variations with more forward movement. While facing your horse, stand slightly to one side with the lead rope in the hand closest to the horse. Begin walking a slight arc, towards the horse's inside hind foot, and encourage the nose, eyes and ears to follow your direction of

travel. If the inside hind does not cross under the belly to a balance up on the outside hind, simply reinforce your request with the popper end of your lead, or the dressage whip. Don't pull on the lead rope! A little forward movement may help to get the weight off the inside hind so that it is free to cross under.

Balance - From the inside hind foot, to the outside shoulder, and a re-balance onto the outside hind foot. If you stop here, then I might call this a "disengagement", but if you continue on with a little forward movement and ask the horse to accomplish this maneuver several times in a row, then you are simply crossing the hind leg under the belly for a balanced turn on the forehand.

Rhythm - This exercise is primarily used to flex and strengthen your horse, and probably would not be used except at the walk. The rhythm I feel for at the walk is a two-beat, very slow gig, with a little breath-in on the second beat, where the horse balances up on the outside hind. (Note: You will have the hind foot crossing under at the trot and canter, but with much more forward movement in a leg yield type maneuver.)

Transitions - At first, stop when the horse balances up on the outside hind foot (i.e. a disengagement); progress to asking for several soft, flowing rhythmic crossing of the hind foot to a balance on the opposite hind.

Visualize - Again, see yourself riding, and feel for where your balance would need to be in order to free up the inside hind foot (Hint: You can't be sitting on the part you'd like to move!). Watch the horse's eyes and ears and note how little bend in the neck is required to softly move the inside hind.



Leg Yield or Shoulder-in Posture on a Circle:

Basic Maneuver - The horse will flow around the human, moving sideways on a circle, with his hips seeking a larger arc than his shoulder.

How to Accomplish - I like to start this from a work-in-hand positioning, standing close to the

horse, with a slight down pressure on the lead where it connects to the halter. Position your toes so that they are facing a little forward and under the horse's neck. Extend your hand closest to the horse's tail towards his inside leg, asking him to step forward, crossing the inside hind foot under the belly towards the outside shoulder. Now begin walking a large circle with your toes drawing a circle under the horse's neck. Hind feet cross, then front feet cross.

Balance – The balance here is the same as the turn on the forehand, but with forward movement.

Rhythm – At the walk and trot, I feel a two-beat rhythm that closely matches where the balance of the movement is coming from and going to. In other words, I hear a “inside hind (one) to outside fore (two); inside hind (one) to outside fore (two).” At the trot, the timing is faster. It is difficult to accomplish this exercise on the ground while in the canter.

Transitions – Try varying the size of the circle or the speed within the gait. Remember that before each transition, take a deep breath, see the picture of what you are going to ask, check your positioning and posture, ask, and allow it to happen.

Visualize – Once again, I see myself riding this exercise, and trying to keep out of the way of the flow of movement... maybe even a little ahead of the movement. I see myself compressing the air between my driving hand (or inside leg while on board) and the horse's body to ask for sideways movement, rather than pushing. I picture the horse lifting his shoulders up, around, and away from me with balance and rhythm and softness.

Ok... now you have the idea. I REALLY am asking you to dissect your ground skill exercises and call yourself and your horse to a very high level of awareness and purposeful accomplishment. Remember that you

are preparing both partners to become physically & mentally ready for spring riding.

Now give yourself a test. Visualize the following skills and ask yourself to describe:

- The basic maneuver
- How to accomplish this skill

What are the balances, rhythms, and transitions you are watching & feeling for:

- Leg Yields (Shoulder-in and Haunches-in postures)
- Turn on the Haunches
- Stop to a Back up
- Turn on Center
- Combination of Exercises

Going back to basics never hurt anyone, nor any horse. Whether these ground skill exercises are new to you or ones you have been practicing for years, we can all benefit from approaching them with a new and deeper mindfulness of what and why we are accomplishing them. I truly believe we will reap the rewards when we are on board. TNT

