

MWFHC'S Basic Horsemanship 101

Haltering and Tying Horses

Halters are designed to help catch, hold, lead and tie horses and ponies. They are nothing else. Every horse should have his own halter correctly sized and adjusted to fit.

Halters come in many styles and in many materials of varying quality. Every horseperson should know the advantages and disadvantages of different kinds, how to adjust them and how to use them.

Types of halters

Some horses are delivered to the new owner in shipping halters.

Shipping halters are made of jute fiber (burlap), are light and usually have a string throat latch. Some are made with a sheepskin overlay, to help protect the horse. A shipping halter is inexpensive and adequate for temporary use but is completely unsatisfactory for use as a permanent halter. It cannot be adjusted well (only the throat latch can be changed) and the fiber lacks strength and durability. The halter is also difficult to keep in place on the horse's head and is almost impossible to keep clean.



Rope halters made of braided cotton are very popular. They are strong, relatively inexpensive and readily adjustable. They are also available in a variety of sizes. Chief disadvantages of rope halters are: difficulty to keep clean, a tendency to rot and mildew if not kept dry, and the lack of durability that is found in top quality leather halters.



Another problem with rope halters is that they shrink. Rain, heavy dew or even high humidity will cause cotton rope halters to shrink. Unless care is taken to frequently readjust rope halters, the shrinking can cause severe pain and even choke the horse.

To eliminate shrinking, a new rope halter should be soaked in water for a few hours or overnight, then thoroughly dried. Clothes dryers, ovens and other sources of high heat should not be used because they tend to over shrink the halter, and heat can damage the fiber, thus weakening the halter.

The type of rope halters used with cattle should not be used with horses. Pulling on the lead rope draws down under the jaw and over the top of the head, much as a lariat rope would. Use these halters only in an emergency. Tie a knot at the point where the lead rope passes through the eye of the halter and the lead rope becomes a halter shank.

Nylon halters have all the advantages of cotton rope halters plus more. They are easily cleaned, not usually affected by dampness, not subject to rotting and mildew, and can be obtained in a variety of colors. Nylon does not shrink; instead, it tends to stretch. In some cases, nylon halters tend to slip at the adjustment points, especially at the crown and under the chin. Therefore, it is necessary to occasionally readjust nylon halters. Nylon halters are more expensive than cotton.



Nylon halters also can be obtained in a flat web design. They look like and are designed like leather halters. They are cheaper than leather, last longer and require less care. However, nylon web halters are difficult to adjust and repair. Like nylon rope, nylon webbing stretches easily. The ends of some pieces of a nylon halter that have been cut with a hot device have a sharp, abrasive edge. These may be removed by cutting with a knife or scissors.

Leather halters are available in a wide variety of types and an even wider variety of prices. Some are adjustable only at the crown piece. These usually must be buckled and unbuckled to be put on and taken off. Some halters have an adjustable chin strap to accommodate various sizes of muzzles, as well as adjustments in the crown piece to fit various lengths of heads. This type of halter is especially well adapted for use on young growing horses or where one halter is used on a number of horses.



Some halters have snaps at the cheek, so unbuckling is not needed when putting on or removing the halter. This type of halter does not work well on horses that dislike having their ears handled or tend to be head shy.

Leather halters require a great deal of care and attention to keep them in good condition. They must be cleaned regularly and inspected frequently for wear or damage. They are most easily repaired, easiest to individualize with name plates and look dressier than other types of halters. In general, they are also more expensive.

Halters of all types may be purchased in various sizes. Most manufacturers list sizes according to breed, age, type or weight. Care should be taken when buying halters to save the sales slip and insist on the right of return or exchange if the size selected is incorrect.

When buying a horse, especially your first horse, ask if a halter is included in the sale. If not, you may find yourself with a horse but no way to hold him. Therefore, for safety's sake and to avoid embarrassment, a halter of correct size should be obtained and be on hand at delivery.

Haltering

Putting a halter on a horse is easy if the horse has good manners and has been properly trained.

To halter a horse in a corral, paddock or pasture, the horse first must be caught. The horse should be trained to let the horsemen approach on the horse's left side.

Carry the halter, unbuckled or unsnapped, in the left hand. Have the lead rope draped over the left elbow. You will hold the nose band in your left hand with the unbuckled crown piece over the top of that. Having everything ready BEFORE you get to the horse.

Approach your horse on the left side. You can either put the lead rope around the neck to “hold” the horse there, or better yet, put your left hand with halter in hand UNDER the neck and right hand OVER the neck, giving it a “bear hug” and grab the long strap -the crown piece of the halter with the right hand. Keep keep holding the noseband with your left hand. Now if your horse would pull away you can clamp down with both hands and you have your horse, same as what you would do if you put the lead rope around the neck.

At this point the left hand drops down and slips the nose band over the nose. Keeping your right hand with the crown piece. You will now be able to buckle the halter.

A lead shank can also be used to catch the horse. This is accomplished by placing the lead around the neck and holding both ends as a noose, while the left hand puts the halter in place. This procedure is especially recommended on head-shy horses or ponies that resist being haltered.

In the case of halters with snaps at the cheek, it may be easier to use the left hand to push the halter back over the ears and use the right to fold the ears forward under the crown piece.

Adjusting the halter

Once the halter is in place, it should be properly adjusted. This normally is simply adjusting the length of the crownpiece. This adjustment is determined by the position of the noseband. The noseband should fall about two inches below the bony point of the cheek.

If the noseband is too high, it may rub against the cheek, causing irritation and loss of hair. This will also cause the chin strap to be pulled too high under the jaw and can restrict jaw movement. If the noseband is too low, it may restrict breathing and allow the horse to rub the halter off too easily.

If the noseband and chin strap are adjustable, they should be set so two large fingers (two inches) may be placed under the noseband. It may be necessary to open, adjust the position, and re-close the clamps on rope and nylon halters to make this adjustment.

If the throat latch can be adjusted, it too should be set properly. The horse's nose should be flexed back to the chest. If there is still room in the throttle, the throat latch is correctly adjusted. This will not be a problem with most halters.

Some halters may have an adjustment on both sides of the crown piece. If so, both sides should be adjusted evenly to keep the halter balanced.

Do's and don'ts of haltering

Halters should not be left on horses that will not be watched or inspected at least daily. Young horses especially should not be turned out wearing halters. Halters may catch on fences, tree branches or brush. The young horse, unable to free himself, panics - usually with serious consequences.

A horse should not be turned out wearing a loose-fitting halter. Horses use their rear feet to scratch their heads, and loose-fitting halters are an open invitation to get a back foot caught or "hung-up."

Leather halters should be cleaned frequently with saddle soap or leather cleaner. Avoid using excess oil of any kind, even special leather oils. Too much oil makes the leather

sticky, and it will stretch and lose its strength. Oil will also rot the stitching. Oiling is necessary only when neglect has allowed the halter to dry out.

New halters should be softened with saddle soap only.

Leather halters should not be allowed to remain damp and to mildew. When unused, leather halters should be cleaned and stored in a dry place. Excess heat should also be avoided.

Rope and nylon halters may be cleaned with soap and water. They should be thoroughly dried. As with leather halters, rope halters not in use should be stored in dry areas.

Tying the horse

Rule of thumb from the Pony Club Manual is : EYE HIGH AND ARMS LENGTH. The horse should be tied at eye level or higher. AND, the lead NO longer than an arms length.

Always tie to a post, wall, or partition that is firmly anchored and will not come loose if the horse pulls on it. The object is to have the tie rope break rather than the structure you are trying to, or the horse's neck. Don't tie your horse to anything that moves. If you are at a show or trail ride be cautious when tying to fences. Old posts can be weak at the bottom, and may be ripped up by your horse.

Most horses learn to "tie" simply because they find it easier to stand quietly than to fight. All horses should be taught to stand tied and should not be considered fully trained until they do so.

The first requirement in correctly tying a horse is using a knot that can be untied quickly, will not slip, and can be untied even though the horse may be pulling back on the tie rope. The recommended knot for tying a halter rope to a fixed object is a quick release knot.

Problem Horses. Some horses dislike being tied and are known as halter pullers. To help prevent halter pulling or to get around this problem, a lariat rope may be placed around the girth of a horse with the standing part of the rope extending forward to the halter ring from between the front legs of the horse. The end of the lariat is then tied to a fixed object. As the horse backs up, the lariat loop tightens around the horse's middle and the rope through the halter rings pulls the head down, without injuring the neck at the atlas joint. It usually takes only a few short sessions before the horse learns to stand quietly.

Another method of tying the halter puller is to use a three-fourths inch or one-inch soft cotton or soft nylon rope. This is tied around the neck. The other end of the rope is threaded through the halter ring and fastened to something solid with a quick release knot. Although very hard pulling could injure the horse, the size of the rope will usually prevent this. This method may not stop a horse from pulling back, but it is a very effective means of keeping it tied.

Tying to post. To tie a horse to a post, stake or smooth vertical pole or tree trunk, a combination knot may be used to prevent the rope from dropping down the pole and from slipping.

A much better arrangement, and one that can be untied easily, is to wrap the lead around the post two or three times, then tie a quick release knot and draw out all the slack. This will be apt to slip down the post if not tied tightly, but it is much safer than a hitch, quick release combination.

The knots should be tied about 3-1/2 to 4 feet above the ground, with 2 or three feet of tie rope between the knot and the halter. It is important to keep the horse from dropping his head down and stepping over the rope. He must, however, be able to get his head up to its normal height.

Tying a horse to a smooth horizontal pole or to a picket line can be safely done in a manner very similar to the procedure used for a vertical pole. In this case, an additional wrap should be made in the hitch, followed by the quick release knot, to keep everything in place. Just as with the vertical post, the hitch knot may be difficult to untie when the horse pulls back too hard. Therefore, the same procedures as outlined above should be used.

Ground ties. When there are no suitable objects to which a horse can be tied, it may be possible to use a ground tie. This might be useful on trail rides, when stopping in an open park or pasture. The first step is to dig a small hole about one foot deep. Then tie a long rope such as a lariat to an object such as a large stone, a branch or even a hammer. Draw the rope tight and place the object in the hole. Carefully pack the dirt into the hole. The other end of the rope is then attached to the halter ring, with a quick release knot, or it may be placed around the horse's neck and secured with a bowline knot. Unless the horse is especially unruly, there should be no problem.

Before using the ground tie method above, or when staking a horse out where the rope will lie in similar fashion along the ground, the horse must be trained not to become entangled in the rope. The horse should allow the rope to rub against both the outside and inside of all four legs and should stand quietly if he does become entangled.

Cross tying. Cross tying not only requires special equipment, it requires special training. Most horses object at first to having their heads held immobile. To start training, allow lots of slack in both ties. Gradually shorten the ties until the desired control is obtained. It is usually advisable to allow 6 to 8 inches of play on each of the center. One way of doing this is to leave the ties long enough to overlap the length of the snaps.

Take special care to prevent a horse from breaking loose when tied. Once a horse breaks loose, either from improperly tied knots or breakage of equipment, he is very apt to try harder to break loose the next time he is tied. Halters, tie ropes and the objects to which they are to be tied should be strong and sound to minimize any chance of the horse breaking free.

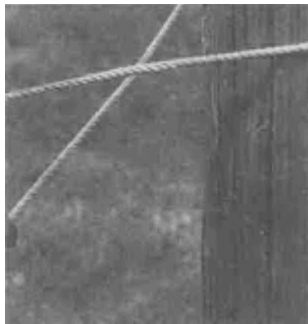
Horses should be tied far enough apart so they cannot kick or bite each other. They should be separated by ropes, rails or distance. A recommended distance between strange horses when tied to a fence or along a picket line is 20 feet. At no time should they be tied closer than 10 feet apart.

Unless a horse is tied in a stall, it should not be left unobserved for long periods of time. This is particularly important with young horses. When possible, tie horses where they

can watch activities around them. When tied this way, they become less bored and less easily frightened. Horses should never be tied fast with bridle reins. Bridles were not designed to act as halters. Neither were reins intended to be used as tie ropes.

Quick-Release Knot

To avoid injury, a quick release knot is good to use when tying and restraining a horse. This knot can be quickly undone, even when a horse is pulling back. First put the lead rope around a solid object (**A**), at about the height the horses eyes are when he is standing at rest. Make a large loop with one end(**B**), then pull a smaller loop (**C & D**) (made with the free end) through the first loop.



A



B

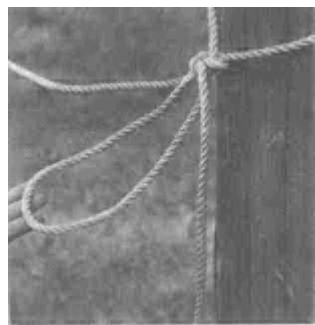


C

The second loop is then pulled tight to complete the knot. (**E**)



D



E



F

If the horse tends to "play" with the tie, to prevent him from releasing himself, the tail end of the rope can be threaded through the first loop to prevent untying.(**F**)

Leading a Horse

1. Begin with your horse haltered with a sturdy [lead rope](#) snapped to the ring on the underside of the [halter](#)
2. Standing on the left hand side ([near side](#)) of the horse hold the lead rope about 8 inches from the snap with your right hand.
3. Hold the end of the lead rope folded to fit comfortably in your left hand. Hold around the middle of the folds so that there are no loops around your hand.
4. Stand at the horse's shoulder.
5. Cue your horse to walk with a slight forward motion of your right hand (not a tug or pull) on the lead rope. Say 'walk' or 'come' or whatever word you choose to use consistently. Walk forward yourself.
6. If your horse doesn't understand how to walk forward at your cue, you can try carrying a long whip that is between 36 to 40 inches long , such as a dressage whip. Hold the whip in your left hand with the folded rope. Tap the horse gently on the top of his croup and ask him to 'walk'.
7. Stop by asking him to 'whoa' (or stop-whatever word you choose), stopping yourself and pulling lightly on the lead rope. He should stop and stand beside you, and not swing out, or try to face you.
8. To ask your horse to trot increase the distance between your hand and the halter to at least a foot so that you don't restrict his head (which can affect his gaits-especially important if your vet is trying to see lameness or you are in the show ring).
9. Cue with the forward motion of the lead rope as you did when walking, tapping his croup with the whip and asking him to 'trot' while jogging forward yourself.
10. Ask your horse to back up by turning around to face him. Take the lead rope in your left hand, and with your right hand point at or press on the horse's left shoulder. Ask him to 'back' and pull down and back slightly with the lead rope. Step forward yourself to stay with your horse as he steps back.

Picking Up A Horse's Hoof

The idea of picking up a horse's hooves can intimidate some owners since a well-placed horse kick would really hurt! Such caution is good, but in reality if you pick up a horse's hoof properly you provide him with no leverage or ability to kick you. This is a situation where a person's worst fears can cause him to imagine an incident that is highly unlikely to occur with careful handling.

Here's how to safely pick up a horse's hoof:

Starting with the front hoof, approach your horse diagonally from his front so that he clearly knows you are there – you don't want to surprise him. Place yourself even with his shoulder and make sure to face his rear; you will both be facing opposite directions during the hoof picking process. Making sure that your feet aren't too close to the horse's hoof, start running the hand parallel to him down his shoulder and along the length of his leg, finally stopping just above his ankle. Gently grasp the ankle portion and click (or otherwise verbally cue him) to ask him to raise his leg. If he's well trained, that small cue will be more than enough and he'll do just what you requested. You're now free to begin picking his hoof.

If your horse is being a bit stubborn or hasn't learned how to pick up his legs yet try leaning into his shoulder as you run your hand down the back of his cannon bone. You can also gently squeeze/pinch the tendons to further cue him to what you would like.

Increase the weight you push against his shoulder until he finally lifts his leg as requested. When picking a horse's hoof you want to remove all debris from the hoof clefts as well as the rim and frog. Be careful around the frog because it can sometimes be a bit sensitive, particularly if the horse has thrush. Once you have finished cleaning the front hoof carefully guide it back to the floor; you don't want to allow the horse to slam it, potentially hitting your foot in the process. Praise your horse and pat him on the front shoulder a bit so he understands that you are pleased with his cooperation, then run your hand along his back to his rear leg. Place yourself in the same position as you did with his front leg and do the process over again.

There is a slight difference between lifting a rear foot and front foot, even though your basic positioning and actions are nearly identical. When you lift your horse's rear foot he will probably give a little jerk that you might misinterpret as a kick. This is a common reflex reaction among horses and nothing for you to worry about.

Secondly, when you raise your horse's rear leg you'll want to step into him a bit so that your hip is underneath his leg. By doing this you lend him some support

and more importantly the position of his leg and his flexed hoof will prevent him from being able to kick you. Clean the hoof, lower it cautiously as you did the first and praise him. Congratulations – you're halfway done!

When lifting any hoof try to make sure your horse is properly squared (balanced evenly on all four legs) so that when you lift one hoof he can easily balance on his remaining three. At no time should the horse actually lean his weight on you!

Once you have picked your horse's hooves a few times it will probably become very simple and take less than 5 minutes to clear all hooves. Most trained horses will raise their hoof for you the moment they feel your leg run down their leg.

It is a very good idea to control your horse's head while you are picking his hooves. This can be done by attaching his halter to crossties or asking a partner hold your horse's head. By controlling his head you ensure your horse can't move away from you while you're trying to pick his hooves, or worse... turn around and take a bite at your rear!

Ground Manners

The basis for good ground manners is respect. Even though a horse usually outweighs his handler by four or five times, he needs to respect the people who work with him. A respectful horse pays close attention to his handler, obeys commands, and is careful not to do things that could hurt his handler. On the other hand, a disrespectful horse may frequently run into his handler or step on people's feet, throw his head up to resist being handled, and mouth or bite his handlers. The latter horse's behavior is not only rude and annoying, but also very disrespectful of his handler's space and safety.

One example of good ground manners in a horse is the way he walks with his handler on a lead rope. A respectful horse walks a couple of feet away, so that he isn't crowding his handler but is still close enough to follow directions. A respectful horse also pays close attention to what his handler is doing, so that he knows when to halt or turn. The proper horse training is important even for something as simple as this, because a horse that walks too close to his handler is in danger of running the person over if something happens to startle him.

Good ground manners can also be found in the simplest of gestures. For example, a horse who lowers his head to help his handler put on his halter or bridle is considered to be well-behaved. Respectful horse behavior is also displayed when a horse comes to his handler in the pasture, rather than running away and making the person catch him.

A common example of poor ground manners is a horse that frequently mouths his handlers. Just like in children, young horses can be very mouthy, exploring things with their lips and tongues. Unfortunately, if this behavior is not corrected, it can lead to an adult horse with a habit of biting when it doesn't get its way or is demanding a treat. Horses also tend to become mouthy when they are frequently

hand-fed treats, so owners should feed treats sparingly and immediately scold their horses for any mouthiness that crops up.

Poor ground manners are often learned when people, particularly inexperienced horse people, own a horse from the time it is very young. Young horse behavior can be very cute, even when it's something that most reasonable people would not want a full-grown horse doing: habits such as standing too close or leaning on their handler, mouthing their handler's hands or clothing, or rearing or bucking at inappropriate times. Unfortunately, if horses are not taught proper ground manners at a young age, these habits can be more difficult to correct later on.

Whether you have a horse to ride, drive, or just as pasture décor, here's what you should know so both you and the horse are happy and safe.

1. Lead Quietly In Hand

When you lead your horse he should walk beside you quietly paying attention to you. When you ask your horse to back up, or step to the side he should float away from your cue like a rubber ducky being pushed in a bath tub, not like a brick being pushed through sand. Your horse shouldn't pull you, barge ahead, hang back or push into you. Teaching your horse to lead properly is the basis for almost every other aspect of good manners.

2. Allow Every Body Part to Be Touched

Your horse should let you touch every part of his body. Often ears, muzzle, sheath or udder, between legs, and chest are sensitive spots that many horses object to having handled. But these areas need to be cleaned, or dressed if they are injured. Teach your horse to have these areas groomed and touched.

3. Stand Quietly To Have Feet Handled

Horses need regular hoof care and they need their hooves trimmed every six to eight weeks. Teach your horse to stand quietly while you clean their hooves or while the farrier works with them. It makes the process much less stressful, (and less painful) for all involved.

4. Accept Paste Wormers

Teaching your horse to accept paste wormers makes regular parasite control easier. It also makes the administering of other oral medications easier.

5. Get On a Trailer

A horse that won't load on a trailer quietly isn't just frustrating—it can be dangerous. You may not plan to leave your property with your horse. But that doesn't mean it shouldn't learn to get on a trailer. Emergencies can happen and you may have to take your horse to a vet clinic. Or you might change your mind about going to horse shows. And while you may never dream of selling your

horse, the unexpected can happen. Often horses who don't lead well, also don't load well.

6. Wait

I use the command 'wait' to tell my horses to wait until I completely open a gate or stall door before coming through, or to stand and wait while I put feed in the buckets. A horse that barges through gates or doors is dangerous to both handler and horse and it makes feeding a time a hassle if the horse is pushing in to get food.

7. Be Caught

Even if your horse is just pasture decoration it will at some point need to be caught. There is nothing more frustrating than having planned an hour of riding, or training or other activity and have that time taken up pursuing your horse around the pasture. It can get costly too, if the farrier or veterinarian is waiting. Things can get dangerous if your horse feels cornered and the only escape is over top of you. Teach your horse to be caught each and every time you want it.

8. Stand Tied

Standing quietly to be tied, whether to a post, beside a trailer, a tree or in cross ties is essential. You'll want to tie your horse to groom, clean hoofs, tack up or harness up, or just to keep him safely out of the way while you attend to other matters. Teach your horse to stand quietly while tied without fussing or pulling. Often horses that don't stand quietly while tied don't lead quietly either.

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