

# Training a Horse to Jump: Easy Step by Step Guide

Few things are as exhilarating as performing a perfect jump on a horse. In that moment of flying through the air, time seems to slow down, and you feel as though you and your horse are working in perfect unison with one another. Jumping can be very intimidating for a first-time horse trainer, so I put together this guide to help you get started.

So, how can you train your horse to jump? **You can train your horse to jump by having them first become comfortable trotting and cantering over ground poles, then slowly working your way towards a small jump over a cross rail. Once they have become comfortable with this, you can begin incrementally increasing the height of the jumps.**

## Training a Horse to Jump: Easy Exercises

When I'm training a horse to do something new, like jumping, **I always start on the ground.** There are quite a few groundwork exercises you can do with your horse to help them understand the concept of jumping. Make sure you have a lunge line and lunge whip in order to do these things.

Once you cover the groundwork aspect, you can do the riding aspect using the same exercises.

### Trot Poles



The first thing I'll do is lunge my horse through trot poles. This may seem menial; however, it is very effective at helping your horse with how to deal with obstacles on the ground as well as teaching them to adjust their stride.

Many horses tend to lose their momentum going through the trot poles; if they did this with a jump, they could potentially crash. **Encouraging your horse with the lunge whip to keep their tempo through the trot poles will help the horse to be more confident going over the obstacle.**

Once you get on and ride your horse through this, the hardest thing will be to keep the tempo of the trot through the trot poles. Use your lower leg to push the horse up and through the poles. Focus on not falling forward and not giving up contact through this obstacle. Sit up straight as you apply pressure with your lower leg.

### **Canter Poles**

After I work with the trot poles, I'll set up one single pole for the horse to canter over. My goal here is to allow my horse to figure out how to adjust their stride and see their distance. When it comes to jumping, seeing a distance is important.

**You don't want your horse to take-off too late or too early to get over the jump. You can teach a horse to see their distance ahead of time and adjust their own stride to get their take-off correct.** This exercise will help to teach your horse how to do this.

Lunge your horse over the pole at the canter. You'll be able to tell when the horse misses their stride because they'll either stretch to get over it or they'll rush a small step to get over it. Once your horse starts to figure out the striding, It will look as if they are just cantering over the pole like normal.

**Time to mount up.** All you're going to do is keep your circle at the canter and let your horse do the same exercise of finding their distance. You can ride in your half seat with soft hands to let your horse figure this out on their own. When your horse starts to see their distance, you'll feel them adjust ahead of time. It's a pretty cool feeling.

### **Cross Rails**

On the ground, set up a cross rail for your horse. Cross rails are the jumps usually used for training new horses because the shape of the "x" makes an inviting shape to go over for the horse.

Start by lungeing your horse at a trot over the cross rail. If your horse has never jumped before, chances are they'll either just run through the jump, kicking down the poles, or they may try to stop. This is why it's important to keep on your horse and don't let them lose momentum.

**If your horse is crashing through the jump, right before they get up to the jump encourage them with the lunge whip.** This will indicate to them that they're going to need to exert more effort in order to do this properly. As soon as they go over the jump correctly, give them praise. When you get on to do this, remember to not rush your horse. You can even ride this like you rode the canter pole. Get in your half seat, use soft hands, and give them a squeeze with your leg just before the jump to encourage them to lift their feet.

## **Horse Jumping Rider Position**



Before you start training a horse to jump, it's vital that you can ride with the correct jump position. **If you're leaning on the horse's neck and rushing them, it's going to be very hard for your horse to learn how to jump properly.**

In addition to proper position in the saddle, you must also learn how to wait on your horse, stay balanced in the saddle, and releasing pressure from your horse's mouth.

The correct jump position includes a light seat, known as a forward seat or a two-point position. **This means that the rider's point of contact with the horse will solely be the rider's legs, not the seat.** Your weight should not fall into your seat when you jump as this will restrict the horse from the full mobility they need to clear the obstacle.

Your eyes should be up, your hands should give towards the horse's mouth in order to release any pressure of the reins. Your hips will bend to bring your chest lower. Your leg will remain still, staying at the girth.

Lastly, the horse's momentum when jumping should encourage you into your two-point, where your bottom is more out of the saddle.

**It's important to remember that even though you may feel like you're leaning forward on your horse, your weight should not be thrown over**

**their neck; instead, keep your weight in your heels to help you balance over the horse's back.**

The mistake too many riders make is by throwing their bodies onto the horse's neck in order to clear the jump. This makes it much harder for the horse to clear the jump, as they now have your weight on their forehead.

## **How to Train Your Horse to Pick Up Their Feet When Jumping**



It can be difficult to help your horse that a jump actually means they need to jump! Some horses just don't know what to do with their feet when it comes to jumping. In order to properly train your horse to jump, you must realize that jumping isn't just about a horse picking up its feet, but it's also about a horse rocking its weight back onto its hind-end in order to properly launch itself over the jump.

In order to truly help your horse to properly carry itself over a jump, I would recommend playing around with some gridwork. Gridwork refers to a series of ground poles and jumps one right after another other. This will encourage the horse to rock back on its haunches in order to propel itself forward through the series of obstacles.

To start out, simply put a trot pole before and after the jump. Depending on the size of your horse's stride depends on the distance you should place the pole from the jump. The pole before the jump will help the horse to rock its weight back. Once your horse can do this simple exercise, feel free to add bounces, one strides, and canter poles.

Just remember that gridwork requires a strong rider. Like mentioned about, horses can lose momentum when going through numerous obstacles one after another. By pushing them forward with your leg, you're not only encouraging them forward, but you're also encouraging them to thrust from the hind-end.

## **How to Train Your Horse from Over Jumping**

When first learning how to jump, some horses may tend to overjump everything; this means that they will tack on a few feet to the jump's existing height. Horses usually do this as insurance that they can clear the jump.

If your horse is prone to overjumping, the best way to help them figure out that the jump isn't going to eat them is simply let them figure it out on their own. What this looks like is having the horse go over the jump until you notice that they're starting to relax more and not try as hard to clear it. As soon as you see a change, you can reward them.

Another thing that could help this is by using gridwork as mentioned above. By adding other poles and a series of different sized jumps, your horse will have to focus on so many other things rather than overjumping a jump. If there is a certain jump that your horse tends to give extra space, like an oxer or a scary solid accessory, add that jump onto your grid. The horse won't have time to zone in and overthink since there are other poles and jumps to clear.

## **What Age Should A Horse Start Jumping?**

A horse's body must be fully developed before they can start jumping. Jumping can cause a lot of trauma and force to the horse's legs and back; if the horse isn't fully developed, this can cause them pain and early signs of arthritis. A developed skeletal and muscular structure can take the trauma of jumping much better than an undeveloped structure.

Most people will wait until the horse is 4-5 years old before they start teaching them to jump. At this age, the majority of horses have developed. I wouldn't recommend jumping your horse any earlier than this.

## **What Horse Breeds are Best for Training to Jump?**



If you plan on training your horse to jump, you probably think that you need a specific type of horse to do so. This isn't necessarily the case. I've seen horses from all different breeds learn to jump. If you're thinking that you want to compete in the Olympics, then you may be better off with a large warmblood like they use; however, if this isn't your plan, here are a few tips to decide whether a horse will be good for jumping.

If you are wanting a horse that you can train to compete in jumping at moderate heights, look for a horse with shorter pasterns and larger hooves. Horses with this attribute can absorb the trauma and stress of jumping

better than a horse with long pasterns and small hooves. While these horses can jump, it's best that they stick to a minimal height.

Depending on how high you want to jump will determine the height of your horse. Yes, I once had a pony that could clear 4 1/2 ft wooden fences and give all the horses a run for their money, but in reality, it will be easier for a larger horse to take you to new heights.

Examine the horse's personality. Usually, a good honest horse will make a good honest jumper. These horses will be easier to train than a horse that has an attitude and fights you for all you're worth. Nevertheless, never under-estimate any type of horse, as I've seen some pretty impressive transformations.