

Correctly Mounting & Dismounting a Horse

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Cowgirl Image*

Horse-Training Article



Disclaimer:

Please use common sense when applying any Horse-Training advice. Horses are dangerous animals, and extreme care must be taken when working with them. Before applying any of the techniques given to you, use your own best judgement. You are responsible for your own safety -- as well as that of your horse, your property, equipment, etc.

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Correctly Mounting & Dismounting a Horse

By Kimberly Keown - Cowgirl Image www.cowgirlimage.net

When Mounting/Dismounting a horse, technique is extremely important. Here's a step-by-step guide to help you mount & dismount with greater ease and safety.

Mounting

1) Always start the mount facing the REAR of the horse, so that if he walks off or kicks his hind legs, you have an eye on his hind legs and can get out of the way. Since you are holding the reins, you can use the inside rein to pull him around you -- which moves his hind end AWAY from you.

2) Place your foot into the stirrup only as far as is necessary to support you. Raise yourself up in the stirrup and wait approximately 3-seconds, still facing the back of the horse. (You'll be staring at his rump.) Then turn -- don't let your toes or knees jab the horse -- raise your free leg over the back, and GENTLY settle into the saddle. Then catch the free stirrup with your foot.

If your horse won't stand still for this, he is not correctly trained to stand for the mount, and needs more practice & training until he does.

While mounting/dismounting - and riding, too - never jam your foot home in the stirrup. It can get stuck if pushed too far in. So always keep your feet as far out of the stirrups as is still comfortable and supportive. Especially when mounting/dismounting, you need to be able to free your feet from the stirrups quickly.

Dismounting

1) Make sure your feet are out of the stirrups as far as possible without falling off them. Raise your leg over the horse's back -- again, don't let your toes or knees on either leg jab the horse. You should turn as the free leg clears so you end up facing the REAR of the horse.

2) After your free leg has cleared, hold yourself in the stirrup a few seconds before stepping down. You should face the REAR of the horse during the 3-second wait. (Alternate between looking at his rump -- where the tail-swishing and kicking actions take place -- and his head, where the biting and moving off take place.) Then kick your stirrup free and slide down, or just step down and then pull your foot out of the stirrup. BE CAREFUL -- stepping down requires a lot of flexibility and there's a greater chance of getting your foot caught in the stirrup if your horse spooks or takes off.

Again, if your horse won't stand still during all of this, he needs more training to stand quietly for the mount/dismount.

Safety Notes

Whether mounting, dismounting, or riding NEVER put your foot very far into the stirrup at ANY TIME. The ball of your foot should be as far as your foot is set into the stirrup. You need to have the ability at any time to kick free of the stirrup without your boot getting caught in it. I shouldn't have to say this, but I know I do: ALWAYS WEAR RIDING BOOTS WITH A HEEL! The heel will help prevent your foot from sliding completely through the stirrup. The rigid boots will protect your foot a little more if the horse steps on you, and you will have more ankle-support. Never wear hiking boots or other types of boots that are wide and might become lodged in a stirrup.

A note on rein-length. When you hold the reins during a mount or dismount, they should be taut enough to be able to halt the horse if he moves off, or to pull him around if necessary. They should be slack enough to not irritate him if you inadvertently jerk them while mounting/dismounting. Keep the reins fairly even -- don't let one rein pull his head to the side. I'm a great believer in teaching a horse to stand still for the mount & dismount, so you shouldn't have to pull his head to the side to distract him from moving off too soon.

Keeping the horse's head straight will also help prevent him from whipping his head around and nipping or whacking you with his teeth or face!

Easy Exercises To Improve Leg-Strength And Technique

1) Walking or jogging up and down stairs is a great strength-builder for your legs!

You don't have to do very much of it to initially increase your leg-strength. Very short periods 2-3 times/week should help a lot, and/or scatter the exercise throughout the day. This is great because it works both legs evenly.

2) The other issue with mounting a horse is flexibility. Riders get very one-sided because they usually mount from the left side. Teach your horse and yourself to mount from the right side, also. (Be careful - some horses are very spooky until they get comfortable with a right-side mount/dismount.)

I like to increase my flexibility by stepping over the bottom rail of a rail-fence. Lifting a leg over the bottom rail is the same action as mounting a horse, only a lot less strenuous. (And you can't cheat by leaning heavily on the rail with your hands.) If you don't have a rail-fence, you can improvise by placing a broom across 2 chairs -- or if that's too high, 2 footstools or boxes. The height should be appropriate for your level of flexibility, as the purpose is to increase your leg flexibility in small increments. So it doesn't matter how low or high the broom is set -- you just need to be able to safely and easily lift your leg over it and cross to the other side.

When you lift the second leg over the rail or broom, use this as a practice dismount. If you tend to lean too hard with your arms on the horse or saddle pommel when you dismount, this exercise should help greatly, as you will be forced to rely on your lower-body, stomach, and abdomen rather than your arms to execute the 'dismount'.

Take your time and hone your technique. Alternate the 'mount' with both left and right legs. Don't neglect one leg just because it's stronger or weaker than the other.

Mounting Blocks

Many people use a mounting block. It's perfectly fine to use one if you need it; just get a good, sturdy one. I have used one with some horses just for the convenience: I'm short and they were tall, or I was riding bareback. It's also good for a horse to get accustomed to it, so I sometimes use one for training purposes.

Be careful at first -- as in teaching your horse to mount & dismount from the right side, you may need to break your horse into using a mounting block, if he's not used to one. Try to find a mounting block that doesn't have any open areas he can get a hoof caught in.

I hope you find these exercises helpful. Good luck!