

[STARTING THE YOUNG HORSE \(PART 2 OF 3\):
LEADING, LONGEING, AND LONG REINING](#)

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Phase II –Leading, Longeing and Long Reining

Leading:

Now we can address ground work while moving about. Start with Leading. Most horses do not lead well – the rider is just a dangling inept ornament while the horse does whatever he wants while being nattered & clutched at.

When leading properly a horse:

- Must not rush past you
- Must not hang back
- Must keep a polite social distance (the lead line must be gently stretched taut and straight, not drooping AT ALL).

This is Social Distance or Intra-herd Distance: ‘herd of two.’ Most horses do not respect your space until or unless they are taught to. However, he should NOT pull on the line. He should keep as much distance as politeness allows – just as he would in the herd with a more Alpha horse. Politeness and attentiveness is key.

Longeing:

Longeing is not ‘frolic time.’ Letting the horse roar around and even buck, is dangerous for the horse’s legs and impairs the ‘herd of two’ relationship. Longeing is not ‘wear-em-down’ time. It is a situation in which to establish the ‘herd of two’ with discipline. If the horse is too fresh, ‘wear him down’ with discipline and precision – to establish the herd-of-two. In this way, it is a (positive) part of training, not just beat them into submission by exhaustion (negative). If longed improperly, a horse only becomes more fit, or injured, but not more disciplined.

Very few people that I know can longe properly. It is an extension of leading – just from a greater Social Distance. Horses very soon figure out what distance from you allows them to blow you off- that is Social Distance or Intra-herd Distance. It is part of herd behavior. Keep adjusting the Social Distance - increase when the horse is paying attention, and decrease when they start to ignore you, by letting out the longe/sending the horse away, or conversely shortening the longe. Proper longeing requires that if you step toward the horse he enlarges the circle, he does not ignore you or rush past you or let the longe line become slack or looped.

I teach longeing with the Portuguese or Spanish cavesson – not the halter and not the bridle. Halters do not exert enough influence, and slip about. A halter with chain is sloppy and slips about, and sometimes too sharp. Working off the bit interferes with the response to the bit that we (later) want and bashes or pulls on the bars of the mouth. The Portuguese or Spanish cavesson is better than a standard longeing cavesson, because it is crisper and sharper when touched, but just as releasable and rewardable – and therefore very tidy.

If a Spanish or Portuguese cavesson is not available, the next best thing is to attach the longe line to the inner bit ring. Sometimes a full-cheek snaffle is necessary if the bit pulls through the mouth.

Any actions made on the longe line should be forward and upward, not downward and backward. Actions on the line must be intermittent, not long drawn-out pulling. If the horse rushes past you, act on the line forward and upward (not backward and not stepping toward the horse’s hip) and get in FRONT of his direction of travel.

Most people longe ‘from behind.’ The correct position is that the trainer is generally at the apex of a triangle of which the base is a line between the horse’s NOSE and its SHOULDER. At odd

moments the longeur may have to step toward the horse's hip, to send him on, but should immediately re-station herself in the correct position near the FRONT of the horse.

Being behind the shoulder, or acting downward and backward invites a twisted neck or a rigid neck, is bad for the horse's legs, and encourages the horse to just run around the longeur.

In principle – never step backward away from the horse. That teaches him that the space between you and him is 'his space.' It must always be 'your space,' which he must vacate LATERALLY when you step toward his shoulder or head.

Longeing is NOT necessarily something done on a circle. It is done at the end of the longe line. If you walk straight ahead, the horse must "keep his place" – at the end of the taut longe line, and his shoulder even with your body (neither surging past you nor lagging behind you!). Longeing is leading from a distance. You should be able to walk anywhere with the horse keeping the line taut at a polite social distance, keeping his shoulder even with your body.

This approach establishes the social distance, the placement relative to the longeur (speed), and allows such things as longeing over cavaletti and small jumps – a good exercise, and a good 'test.' You should be able to keep the horse rate-able in the approach, and you should be able to stop him on the spot immediately after the cavaletti or jump. The horse must NEVER 'take over' and speed away.

To deal with the horse that wants to rush past you, or does not halt promptly from one barked command of "WHOA!!" you must step in the direction IN FRONT OF the horse's head. You are the apex of the triangle, and that apex needs to get in front of the horse. Reel yourself out along the longe line hand-over-hand to shorten the longe line without stepping back NOR LOOSENING THE LINE. You are essentially 'heading him off.' You have to KEEP stepping in the direction in FRONT of the horse's head until the rein is however short it needs to be to allow you to stop the horse with upward actions on the line (you may end up nose-to-nose!). Then stand quietly for some seconds to let the horse reflect on his iniquities, do not chase him off immediately. Stroke him or pat him, so he knows he 'got it right,' and who is the boss.

Constantly re-establish auditory and visual cues and tactile influences (whip cues and actions on the cavesson as necessary, – DO NOT NAG). "Nagging" is asking the horse to do something and settling for no response or wrong response. This teaches the horse the wrong response, or worse, that it can ignore you. Beating the ground with the whip disciplines the ground, not the horse. Mindless waving of the whip inures the horse to the rider's effect and supremacy.

Separate CUE from CORRECTION. If you cluck and he does not react, attack! Then soothe or correct. Repeat. The horse should react with just one cluck. Endless clucking, whining or contorting makes the horse brain-dead. He will treat you like a tick-bird or other harmless creature, or a horse lower on the pecking order.

Long Reining:

After the longeing has been taught, Long Reining is a useful tool. It teaches the horse about the bit, turning and stopping – useful stuff for them to learn before you start to ride the horse.

It is the 'bridge' between longeing and riding. It is difficult to master – it is not a one-lesson job. It is a situation in which a person can SEE the effect of the reins and of the driving aids (when riding, our field of vision is only the neck).

Long Reining allows many more possibilities than longeing – learning about the effects of the bit, turns and changes of direction, figures, and adjustments in carriage. Over time, long reining helps develop collection. It is an excellent venue for teaching piaffe and passage.

To introduce the horse to Long Reining, begin with the inside rein going directly from the bit ring to the rider's hand (not thru the surcingle). To the horse, this is just familiar old longeing.

Gradually introduce the effect of the outside line (which DOES go thru the surcingle). When it is working, run the inner rein thru the surcingle.

The length and weight of the reins, the friction thru the terrets and the time delay require that we keep two things in mind:

1. Always loosen one rein before using the other.
2. Sharper actions may be required (unlike riding) to make the demand 'crisp'.

However crisp the rein action, it must be brief. Brief and sharp is better than long and mauling. The weight of the reins and the friction thru the terrets keep enough contact – don't try to keep a steady contact with your hands as you do in riding. Don't CLING!

The surcingle must be configured so that there is no extra drag on the reins –HIGH- set rigid terrets (like oar-locks), not rings that fold down onto the body of the surcingle (too much friction!). The terrets/rings must be high (toward the position of the rider's hands), not low (which pulls backwards and downwards on the bars of the mouth and pulls the horse down onto the forehead). The long reins must go from the terrets directly to the hand, not around the haunches (too much friction!).

Be sure that you have taught the horse during the ground work to wear the bridle and to turn and raise its head on request from gentle upward rein action.

Long reining can be done from the middle of a circle (like longeing) or with the trainer moving about and along, or from behind. The main rule about the length of the reins is "Stay out of kicking distance." One can go from center-of-circle to next-to-the-horse while moving about, to behind-the-horse, while doing figures.

As with longeing, a main consideration in long reining on a circle is to be towards the front of the horse (even with the shoulder), not behind him (even with the haunches).

If the horse does not stop instantly to the voice aid, give quick, crisp, brief corrections – do not cling or hang on. If it does not go promptly and politely from one cluck – make yourself noticed!

You should be able to set the pace and adjust the pace. The horse must go in "dial-a-speed" or "cruise-control" mode on loose reins. Do not search for the 'right' speed, but ANY speed you choose. Don't cling!

A competent trainer can teach many useful and practical things on the long reins:

- Halt (uphill, crisp)
- Half Halt
- Bending
- Figures
- Lengthening of stride
- Collection and Collecting
- Leg Yield
- Shoulder In
- Half Pass

Long reining is invaluable and saves years of tears, but is difficult to learn to do well. Many of the difficulties of later riding can be pre-empted here, if done well. The horse should be comfortable with the bit. If it does not turn its head and raise its head easily on request, re-install this.