



# FIRST PRINCIPLES

# OF HORSE TRAINING

## International Society for Equitation Science

These principles are essential for optimal welfare and training efficiency. They apply to all horses regardless of age, breed, training level and equestrian discipline. Does your training system demonstrate each principle?

### Train according to your horse's ethology and cognition

Horses have evolved to live and process information about the world in a certain way

- ✓ They need the company of other horses, movement and virtually continuous eating
- ✗ Take care about blaming them for past behaviours as they may not recall events like humans do

### Train easy-to-discriminate cues

- ✓ Each cue should be unique
- ✓ Cues for each response should be clearly separate (particularly acceleration and deceleration)
- ✓ This relates to all rein and leg pressures, as well as voice, seat and posture cues

### Elicit responses one-at-a-time

- ✓ Ask for one thing at a time
- ✓ Time cues so they elicit the correct limb movement
- ✓ Cues can be closer as responses are consolidated
- ✗ Simultaneous or clashing cues inhibit each other and gradually he will desensitise to your cues

### Form consistent habits

When training new responses, always:

- ✓ Maintain the same context / environment (it can be gradually altered once responses are consolidated)
- ✓ Use the same cues in the same place on his body or relative to his body
- ✓ Shape transitions so they are the same structure and duration each and every time

### Use learning theory appropriately

Learning theory describes the processes by which horses learn.

Your learning theory toolkit includes:

#### Habituation

Use habituation techniques to help him become accustomed to events and stimuli and no longer react.

- ✓ Habituation techniques include progressive desensitisation, overshadowing, stimulus blending, counter conditioning and approach conditioning.

#### Classical conditioning

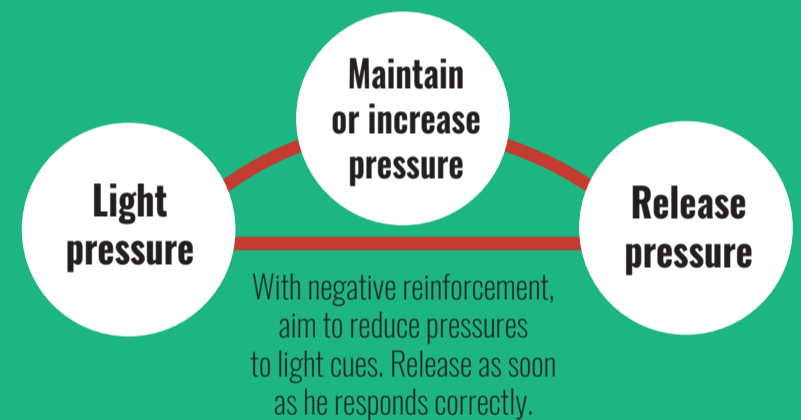
Using cues to trigger and elicit behaviours. When training cues your timing needs to be precise to coincide with the start of the desired behaviour.

- ✓ Classically conditioned cues include, seat, voice, posture and gestures.

#### Operant conditioning

The use of rewards and consequences.

- ✓ Use both positive and negative reinforcement. When used correctly these forms of operant conditioning are ethical and effective.
- ✓ Timing is everything. Aim to quickly reduce any pressure-based cues to light forms of pressure.
- ✗ For optimal welfare you should avoid punishment.



### Shape responses and movements

- ✓ First reinforce a basic attempt at the target behaviour
- ✓ Then aim to improve the behaviour in a step-by-step way

### Demonstrate minimum levels of arousal sufficient for training

- ✓ He should be as calm as possible during training
- ✗ When certain levels of arousal are exceeded learning and welfare suffer

*This is a brief overview of the horse training principles. It has been simplified for ease of use. It may be printed in its exact form for public display. You can find a more complete description of each principle on the ISES website. Visit:*

[www.equitationsscience.com](http://www.equitationsscience.com)

### Train persistence of responses (self-carriage)

- ✓ He should maintain rhythm, straightness and outline without the need for constant cueing
- ✗ Constant cueing ('nagging' or 'motivating') can lead him to habituate to your cues

### Train only one response per signal

- ✓ Each cue should elicit a single response
- ✓ Rein cues, which relate to deceleration and turning, are clearly separate from leg cues, which relate to acceleration
- ✗ He can't differentiate leg and rein cues which are used for a multitude of responses

### Avoid and dissociate flight responses

- ✓ Avoid flight response behaviours at all costs

**Did you know?** Flight response behaviours resist extinction, may reappear spontaneously, and are often accompanied by many physical and behaviour problems. They can result in acute and chronic stress.