



BEYOND LESSONS:
A GUIDE TO RIDING ON YOUR OWN
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Beyond Lessons:

The purpose of this brochure is to educate our riders on some of the more involved aspects of horsemanship, which aren't usually covered in our general lesson program. You now have more freedom to ride and to have fun. With that freedom, however, comes more responsibility— for yourself and for your horse.

Remember: your choices affect both you *and* your horse; you are responsible for making sure both of you have fun and stay safe. You must take proper care of your horse before, during, and after your rides.

Why ride on your own?

- Practice skills learned in lessons
- Build physical strength
- Learn self-reliance and problem-solving skills
- Strengthen your relationship with your horse
- Have fun!

How to get the most out of your rides:

- 1) **Goals:** Have an idea of what you want to do/accomplish and a plan for how to do so.
- 2) **Get better:** Aim to improve at least one thing each time you ride.
- 3) **Have fun:** Not every ride needs to be work/practice. Your goal can be to hang out with your horse and have fun. Just remember that proper leads/diagonals, steering, and speed control are always important.
- 4) **Quit while you're ahead:** It's not always about how long you ride for. Always try to end your ride on a positive note; reward your horse for good behavior.
- 5) **Bad days:** You and/or your horse might have an "off" day— that's okay. Revise your goals for the day, and go with the flow.
- 6) **If you're having a problem, STOP.** Think about what's going on. What would your instructor suggest you do? Are you doing something wrong, or just not doing something right enough? Remember— most problems stem from the rider, not the horse.
- 7) **Keep a notebook:** Write down your pre-ride goals, then write how long you rode, what you worked on, and how things went. Add questions you want to ask your instructor and things to think about for your next ride. After lessons, write down feedback your instructor gave you and things you want to do on your own.

General Rules and Guidelines:

Who can help you?

Depending on the day/time you ride, Working Students & Staff may be around the barn. Please remember that they have many chores to complete; helping you isn't necessarily part of their job! Working Students must be focused on taking care of lessons and doing their other chores. Staff members must be focused on caring for the horses.

However, if you need help, you may ask someone politely to help you. If you are nice and make them feel appreciated, they are more likely to help you out now and in the future! If you are rude and demanding, no one will want to help you. So please– be considerate, thankful, and appreciate what others do for you.

Getting ready to ride:

- 1) **Groom** thoroughly, just as you would before and after a lesson.
 - a) Feet must be picked before and after you ride.
 - b) Grooming is a great way to bond with your horse, and it's often one of the first ways we figure out something is wrong. Is your horse bleeding, warm, or swollen? Do they have scratches, thrush, etc.? You likely spend the most time with your horse. Instructors and staff cannot inspect every horse every day, so you are your horse's first line of defense against injury. If something looks different or wrong, let us know so we can take a look and keep an eye on it.
 - c) Scratches, thrush, and other issues can cause pain. Notice them early, and your horse will be happier.
- 2) **Tack properly:** Check the tack list every time you ride– it does change periodically! Make sure your pads and girths aren't bunched up. Poor-fitting tack can cause rubs and sores, which can cause serious pain that puts your horse out of commission.
- 3) **Record your ride time:** There is a list in the left/old/small side of the Grooming Barn (immediately to the right when you walk in). Write down the date, your name, your horse, and how long you rode. This is extremely important, so we can monitor horse usage. No horse deserves to be over- or under-worked.
- 4) **Before you mount:** Double-check your tack. Did you tighten your girth again?
- 5) **After you mount:** Check your tack *again*. Are your stirrups an appropriate length? Does the girth seem too loose now that you're on? Loose girth = slipping saddle = injured rider.

When and where and how to ride:

- 1) FMF opens at 7am and closes at 10pm every day.
- 2) **Practice and Half-lease rides:** No jumping allowed. You must ride on your scheduled day/time, or you lose that ride.
- 3) **Owner and Full-lease rides:** Please call the farm before 12pm to let us know exactly when you plan to ride on any given day (“This evening” is not specific enough!).
 - a) Unless you pay full board, you get a discount for allowing us to use your horse in the lesson program. If we cannot use your horse enough because you are constantly riding it when we need it, you will have to pay full board!
 - b) If you come out to ride and your horse is on the board for a lesson, you may speak to the instructor to see if we can work something out. But please, respect the fact that the instructors are busy, and do not interrupt them in the middle of teaching.
- 4) Everyone may ride in the Indoor and Little Outdoor (weather permitting).
 - a) Only 2 light switches may be on while riders are free-riding in the Indoor. Before you leave, turn off all lights if you are the last person to leave.
- 5) If your contract allows it, you may also ride in the Big Outdoor and/or the Field when they are marked OPEN. (**Remember:** No jumping in the Big Outdoor or the Field without an instructor—ever. Seriously. You will be expelled from FMF if you do.)
 - a) **Field Riding:**
 - i) Wear a vest and use a neck strap
 - ii) You must have another person with you at all times. (They can be on the ground or mounted). We need to be able to find you if you fall off and get hurt.
 - iii) Again: NO JUMPING.
 - iv) Stay on the mowed paths.
 - v) Riders doing canter/gallop sets have the right of way. Move slightly off the path and face the oncoming horse/rider. (If you think your horse would get upset, don’t ride in the field if someone is out galloping.)
 - vi) Use common sense! (e.g., If it is very cold/windy and your horse hasn’t been out or isn’t entirely quiet, ride in an arena to see how they’re doing.)
 - vii) On your way back from the Field, start yelling “Door!” loudly when you’re about to reach the Porta Potty. Keep yelling “Door!” until you are safely past the Indoor.
 - a) **Big Outdoor Riding:**
 - i) Again: NO JUMPING.
 - ii) Stay in the marked areas.
 - (1) When dressage arenas are set up, you may only ride in them with explicit permission from an instructor.
 - (2) The sections nearest the Indoor have an iffy base and could injure you and your horse.
- 6) **Sharing Space:**
 - a) In the event of inclement weather (meaning the outdoor arenas are frozen, entirely flooded, or it is pouring down rain): You may share space with most private lessons (check with the instructor first), but you must enter the space when the lesson does, so that you do not disturb them midway through.
 - b) You may not share space with a group lesson.
- 7) **Weather:**
 - a) **No riding in thunderstorms!** If you hear thunder/see lightning, get off your horse immediately and lead it back to the barn ASAP. Getting struck = no fun!
 - b) **Snow/Ice:** If local schools are closed, call the weather line (extension 5). Usually, it is okay to ride later in the day, but please give us time to get the driveway clear— it can get very dangerous for you, your car, and your horse!

Ride appropriately:

- 1) **Warm-up:** *If you do not properly warm your horse up, they can be seriously injured.*
 - a) Helps loosen up your horse's muscles.
 - b) Mentally prepares your horse (and you!) for work.
 - c) Allows you to gauge your horse's mood & physical soundness.
 - d) How?
 - i) Walk first. Trot for at least 10 minutes before you canter.
 - ii) Do not canter more than 2 times around the arena in one go. Take at least a 5-min. break between long canter sets.
 - iii) Canter times vary depending on your horse and weather.
- 2) **Ride time and effort**
 - a) Your horse works harder when you ride on your own. In group lessons, they get many breaks between cantering and jumping, while the other horses and riders take their turns.
 - b) Use good judgment. The amount of work your horse can do varies with weather, age, soundness, and workload. Your horse's needs change when the weather is extremely hot/cold.
 - c) If your horse has already been ridden today, or will be ridden later, take that into consideration.
- 3) **Poles and jumping**
 - a) Poles for walking/trotting must be at least 12' apart (the length of the long jump poles). Poles for cantering must be at least 48' apart.
 - i) This allows for differences in strides, and allows for recovery if there is a mistake.
 - ii) Jumping high is fun, but it's not something your horse needs to do repeatedly. Don't waste your horse's energy.
 - iii) Practice jumps: no higher than 2'.
 - iv) Do not set up jumps as a line. (The distances in lines are very specific; improper distances can result in injury.)
 - v) Full lessees: there is a 10 fence limit per ride.
- 4) **Cool-down:** Just like with warming up, if you do not properly cool your horse down, they can be seriously injured.
 - a) You must walk for at least 5 minutes at the end of each ride.
 - b) If it is hot or you were working hard, you should cool down for even longer.
 - c) When you untack, sponge off your horse if they are hot and sweaty. There should not be saddle/girth/bridle marks left hours later.
 - d) When appropriate, turn on the fans in the grooming barn or in your horse's stall. Just be sure to turn them back off when they're no longer needed.
 - e) Feet must always be picked after each ride.
 - i) *If there is a problem with your horse's shoe/hoof, you need to tell someone!* Let the instructor on duty know (or staff if there is no instructor).
 - ii) Owners/Lessees: When there is a shoe/hoof emergency (lost, loose, etc.): Call Mr. Stephen and leave him a message (443-375-7826).
 - (1) **Do not** approach Mr. Stephen in the driveway– this drives him nuts! (You wouldn't like it if someone from work showed up at your house, would you?)

5) Putting your horse away

- a) When you're all done, make sure that you put your horse where they need to be (stall or field).
 - i) Do not leave your horse on crossties, unless you are explicitly told to do so. Horses have been left standing in the barn for hours; that is extremely unfair!
 - ii) If you are unsure of where to put your horse, please ask! Staff is available (at least) from 7am to 6:30pm every day, so there is usually someone around.
 - iii) If you cannot find anyone, the safest place to put your horse is their own stall.
- b) Make sure your horse has water after you've ridden. Staff fills water buckets 3x/day. Depending on the timing, your horse may not have much water in their stall. You are always welcome to fill their bucket.
- c) Horses love treats, but do not hand-feed horses in the Grooming Barn. This makes the other horses jealous and can cause fights. You may put treats in their feed buckets.

Clean up after yourself:

You are the only person responsible for cleaning up after yourself and your horse. It is not anyone else's job! Do not leave behind your mess and expect someone else to clean it up.

- 1) Clean up all dirt, hair, etc. from grooming stalls before *and* after you ride. (Hair goes in the trash, not muck tubs!)
- 2) Clean up poop/pee in the Grooming Barn, Driveway, and arenas immediately.
- 3) Put your tack and riding gear away ASAP. This includes crops, gloves, helmets, girths, etc.
 - a) Keep the tack rooms clean and tidy. Both school tack rooms and private tack rooms should be kept clean and tidy.
 - b) If using school tack: you must clean the bridle, saddle, and girth at least once per month, and whenever tack gets wet.
- 4) When you leave an area (barn, stall, riding arena, etc.), turn off all lights/fans before you leave. Electricity is expensive.

Use your own supplies:

If you own or full lease a horse, you must purchase and use your own products for your horse, including (but not limited to):

Fly spray, shampoo, thrush/scratches medications, treats, saddle pads, leather cleaning/conditioning supplies, etc.

DO NOT USE OTHER BOARDER'S/LESSEE'S TACK, TREATS, FLY MASKS, ETC. UNLESS THEY HAVE GIVEN YOU EXPLICIT PERMISSION.

Fun Activities

1) Riding bareback

- a) You may ride in shorts in warmer weather
- b) Get on in the arena
- c) Stay in the Indoor or Little Outdoor
- d) Play Sit-A-Buck: Put a \$1 bill under your thigh/calf; see how long you can keep it there)
- e) You can do the same things you would do under saddle, as long as you're comfortable

2) Riding with friends

- a) Pretend horse show/judging
- b) Pretend lessons: Take turns teaching
- c) Play Sit-A-Buck: Put a \$1 bill under your thigh or calf; see who can keep it there longer
- d) Follow the leader
- e) Take turns making up courses/patterns
- f) Musical stalls
- g) Pole bending/barrel racing (DO NOT CANTER TURNS)
- h) Touch the letter (1 point per touch)
- i) Trail class (Obstacles: weave poles, etc.)

3) Various exercises

- a) Work on leads and diagonals
- b) Leg yielding (at the trot, maybe even at the canter!)
- c) Strength building: Do exercises in 2-point, standing, without stirrups, etc.
- d) Dressage tests
- e) Lengthen and shorten strides between markers– See how many/few strides you can get in each gait
- f) Transitions at specific spots– make them smooth, be well-prepared
- g) Circles: Pace off round circles to see if you can get the same number of steps each time. Pay attention to the size and shape of circles.
- h) Serpentine
- i) Trot/canter over poles – Single poles or lines of poles (must be at least 12' apart)
- j) Work on things you've learned in class

And finally– when in doubt...

You can always ask your instructor for homework!