

# Table of Contents

- Imprint
- Introduction

## 1. Basics of Horse Training

- 1. 1. Groundwork with Horses
  - 1. 1. 1. Equipment for Groundwork
  - 1. 1. 2. Basic Groundwork Exercises
  - 1. 1. 3. Understanding Horse Body Language
  - 1. 1. 4. Safety during Groundwork
- 1. 2. Clicker Training for Horses
  - 1. 2. 1. Principles of Clicker Training
  - 1. 2. 2. Introduction of the Clicker
  - 1. 2. 3. Simple Exercises for Beginners
  - 1. 2. 4. Advanced Clicker Techniques
- 1. 3. Pole Work with Horses
  - 1. 3. 1. Setting up a Pole Course
  - 1. 3. 2. Basic Pole Exercises
  - 1. 3. 3. Pole Work for Different Gaits

## 2. Advanced Training Methods

- 2. 1. Gymnastics for Horses
  - 2. 1. 1. Stretching Exercises for Horses
  - 2. 1. 2. Lateral Work
  - 2. 1. 3. Lunging Work

- 2. 1. 4. Cavaletti Training
- 2. 2. Mental Training for Horses
  - 2. 2. 1. Promoting Concentration
  - 2. 2. 2. Calmness Training
  - 2. 2. 3. Mental Preparation for Competitions
- 2. 3. Special Training Techniques
  - 2. 3. 1. Long Rein Work
  - 2. 3. 2. Liberty Dressage
  - 2. 3. 3. Dual Activation
  - 2. 3. 4. Sensitization Exercises
- 3. Health and Wellbeing in Training
  - 3. 1. Warm-up and Cool-down
    - 3. 1. 1. Effective Warm-up Exercises
    - 3. 1. 2. Cooldown Techniques
    - 3. 1. 3. Adaptation to Different Weather Conditions
  - 3. 2. Nutrition for Sport Horses
    - 3. 2. 1. Adjusting Feed to Training Intensity
    - 3. 2. 2. Electrolytes and Fluid Balance
    - 3. 2. 3. Feed Supplements for Performance Horses
    - 3. 2. 4. Feeding Management Before and After Training
  - 3. 3. Injury Prevention
    - 3. 3. 1. Hoof Care and Health
    - 3. 3. 2. Saddle Fit and Equipment Check

- 3. 3. 3. Training Load Management
- 3. 3. 4. Early Detection of Overload Signs

#### 4. Psychology in Horse Training

- 4. 1. Learning Behavior of Horses
  - 4. 1. 1. Basics of Horse Psychology
  - 4. 1. 2. Positive Reinforcement in Training
  - 4. 1. 3. Habituation and Desensitization
  - 4. 1. 4. Considering Individual Learning Pace
- 4. 2. Communication Between Human and Horse
  - 4. 2. 1. Nonverbal Communication
  - 4. 2. 2. Timing and Precision in Aid Giving
  - 4. 2. 3. Setting Boundaries Without Violence
- 4. 3. Motivation and Willingness to Perform
  - 4. 3. 1. Variety in Daily Training
  - 4. 3. 2. Integrating Playful Elements
  - 4. 3. 3. Balance Between Challenge and Overwhelm
- Sources
- Image Sources

Artemis Saage

# **Horse Training Fundamentals: Natural Horsemanship & Groundwork Guide**

**Master Equine Behavior, Communication, and  
Health Through Proven Training Methods for  
Better Horse Wellness and Riding Success**

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## Introduction

To provide you with the best possible reading experience, we would like to familiarize you with the key features of this book. The chapters are arranged in a logical sequence, allowing you to read the book from beginning to end. At the same time, each chapter and subchapter has been designed as a standalone unit, so you can also selectively read specific sections that are of particular interest to you. Each chapter is based on careful research and includes comprehensive references throughout. All sources are directly linked, allowing you to delve deeper into the subject matter if interested. Images integrated into the text also include appropriate source citations and links. A complete overview of all sources and image credits can be found in the linked appendix. To effectively convey the most important information, each chapter concludes with a concise summary. Technical terms are underlined in the text and explained in a linked glossary placed directly below. For quick access to additional online content, you can scan the QR codes with your smartphone.

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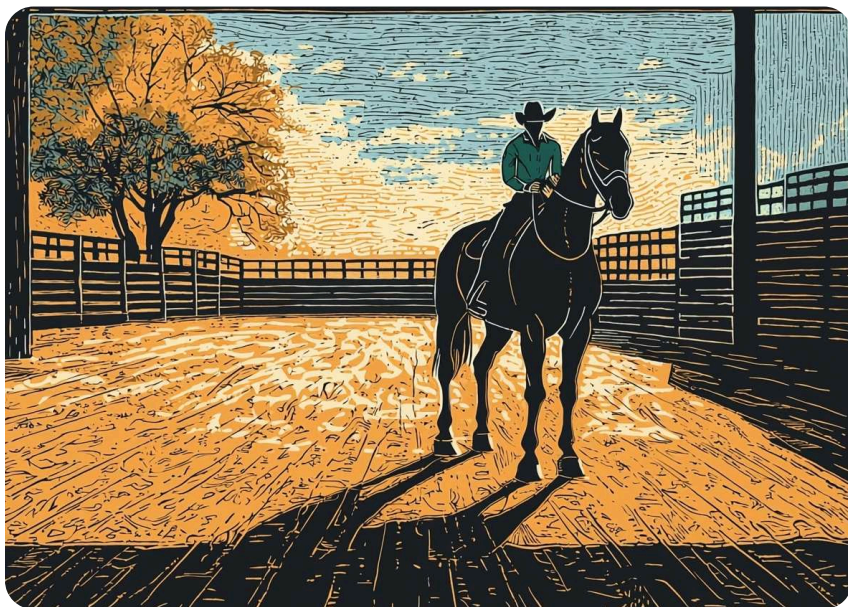


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# 1. Basics of Horse Training



he training of horses is an art that requires patience, expertise, and a deep understanding of these fascinating animals. But what constitutes successful training? How does one develop a trusting relationship with the horse while simultaneously establishing a solid foundation for further training? The fundamentals of horse training encompass far more than just technical aspects. They combine traditional knowledge with modern insights from behavioral research and biomechanics. Central questions arise: What role does body language play in the communication between human and horse? How does one design a systematic training approach that considers both the physical and mental needs of the horse? From the right choice of equipment to basic exercises and advanced training methods—each aspect builds upon the other and shapes a comprehensive concept. The following chapters provide a practical insight into the essential foundations of horse training and demonstrate how you can successfully integrate these into your own training.



## 1. 1. Groundwork with Horses

ie Bodenarbeit bildet das Fundament jeder soliden Pferdeausbildung - doch was macht qualitativ hochwertiges Groundwork eigentlich aus? Während einige Ausbilder auf traditionelle Methoden schwören, setzen andere auf moderne Trainingsansätze. Dabei stellt sich die Frage, welche Übungen tatsächlich zielführend sind und wie sie das Vertrauensverhältnis zwischen Mensch und Pferd nachhaltig stärken können. Die Herausforderung liegt oft darin, die richtigen Signale zu setzen und gleichzeitig die individuellen Bedürfnisse des Pferdes zu berücksichtigen. Wie können wir eine klare Kommunikation aufbauen, die sowohl für das Pferd als auch für den Menschen verständlich ist? Welche Rolle spielen dabei Körpersprache, Timing und die richtige Dosierung der Hilfen? Die folgenden Seiten bieten einen strukturierten Einblick in die wesentlichen Aspekte effektiver Bodenarbeit und zeigen auf, wie Sie Ihr Training Schritt für Schritt aufbauen können.

*„The head position of a horse reveals much about its emotional state - a relaxed horse carries its head in a neutral position or slightly lowered, while a raised head and tense neck often indicate heightened alertness or nervousness.“*

## 1. 1. 1. Equipment for Groundwork



The right equipment forms the foundation for successful and safe groundwork with horses. In principle, the equipment should be of high quality, robust, and suitable for horses [s1]. Special attention is given to the functionality and reliability of the individual pieces of equipment. The centerpiece of the equipment is a well-fitting halter. Adjustable training halters, available in various sizes, have proven particularly effective [s2]. When choosing the appropriate halter, it is important to ensure a correct size adjustment—it should neither be too tight nor too loose. A special rope halter made of 6mm (1/4") double-braided polyester rope is particularly suitable for working with untrained or sensitive horses [s2]. For leading work and basic exercises, a lead rope approximately 4.3m (14') long made of braided material is required [s2]. This should have a sturdy carabiner and feel good in the hand. In daily work, it has been shown that a cotton lead rope is particularly pleasant to handle and additionally supports safe work with the horse's legs and feet. For advanced exercises and lunging work, longer lines are essential. A line about 9m (30') long made of lightweight nylon with a cotton core offers optimal properties for groundwork [s2]. It allows for sensitive communication while providing good handling. To personalize the equipment and distinguish it from others, colored beads or knots can be incorporated [s1]. An important aspect of the equipment also concerns the working area itself. Ideally, a flat area of 40m x 20m should be available



*Halter* <sup>[i1]</sup>



*Sidepulls* <sup>[i2]</sup>

[s3]. This should be fenced or otherwise enclosed. For better orientation, it is advisable to set up markers, similar to the dressage letters in a riding arena. For various exercise setups, 4-6 ground poles and corresponding supports are needed [s3]. The basic equipment also includes safety gear such as a helmet, gloves, and ideally a back protector [s3]. These are particularly important when working with young or inexperienced horses. Another important tool is the training or lunging stick [s4], which serves as an extension of the arm and supports the trainer's body language. For special training methods, additional aids such as rope halters or sidepulls may be used [s1]. However, these should only be used by experienced trainers who are familiar with their correct application. When working with these aids, particular attention should be paid to gentle and precise influence. An often underestimated but important aspect is the availability of a protected, safe, and quiet place for the preparation and follow-up of training [s3]. This area should provide enough space for grooming and saddling and be free from disturbing environmental influences. When acquiring equipment, one should not skimp on quality. High-quality materials and careful workmanship ensure not only longer durability but also better communication with the horse [s1]. Regular checks of the equipment for wear or damage are essential for the safety of both human and horse.

## **Glossary**

### **Rope Halter**

A training device made of rope that is placed around the horse's neck and serves to refine communication during free work. Allows for subtle aids in the shoulder and neck area.

### **Sidepull**

A bitless head control that acts laterally on the horse's head and serves as an alternative to the bit. Usually consists of a noseband with lateral rings for attaching reins.

## 1. 1. 2. Basic Groundwork Exercises



he basic groundwork exercises form the foundation for a successful collaboration between human and horse. They serve to build trust and establish clear communication [s5]. It is essential to proceed systematically and with a clear structure. One of the most important basic exercises is controlled forward and backward movement. In this exercise, the trainer positions themselves beside the horse's shoulder and signals the horse to back up by applying gentle pressure with their hand or lead rope. As soon as the horse takes even a single step backward, the pressure is immediately released—this is the reward [s5]. This exercise should initially involve only a few steps and can be expanded later. Control over the forehand and hindquarters represents another fundamental aspect. To mobilize the forehand, gentle pressure is applied to the halter while the trainer's position encourages the horse to yield. In the hindquarter turn, the so-called pressure point is crucial—this is located approximately at the height of the horse's hip [s5]. By skillfully positioning themselves, the trainer can prompt the horse to step around the forehand with its hindquarters. Lateral movement (Lateral Flexion) is a more advanced exercise that must be developed gradually [s6]. Initially, the horse is encouraged to bend its head to the side through light rein pressure. Once it gives, the pressure is released. This exercise promotes suppleness and prepares the horse for later riding exercises. Particularly important is the work with moving objects for desensitization [s7]. For instance, a plastic bag or a rope is first presented at a safe distance and then gradually brought closer to the horse. The "approach-and-retreat method" has proven effective here: The object is presented and then removed before the horse shows negative reactions [s7]. The vertical flexion is another important basic exercise [s6]. Here, the horse learns to respond to gentle pressure on the halter by lowering its head. This promotes relaxation and serves as the basis for later collection. The trainer stands beside the horse and gives short, gentle downward impulses on the lead rope. For all exercises, the principle of gradual increase applies [s8]. New elements are only introduced once the previous ones are mastered securely. It is important to familiarize the horse with the exercises from various perspectives [s8]. For example, lateral movement should be practiced evenly to both the right and left. The development of rhythm and cadence also plays an important role [s6]. The horse should learn to maintain a consistent pace independently. The trainer

supports this through calm, even movements and clear body language. It is important to give the horse time to find its own balance. For advanced exercises such as working in squares or S-patterns [s9], it is crucial that the basics are securely established. These more complex figures combine various basic elements and enhance the horse's coordination and attention. In all exercises, safety is the top priority [s7]. Ropes and lead lines must never be wrapped around limbs, and the trainer must always assume a position that allows for quick evasion in case of emergency. Positive reinforcement through immediate release of pressure upon correct response is the key to success.

## **Glossary**

### **Cadence**

A consistent, rhythmic movement pattern of the horse characterized by regular footfall and tempo rhythm.

### **Desensitization**

A systematic process to acclimate the horse to potentially frightening stimuli. This is based on neurobiological learning processes and leads to lasting calmness.

### **Lateral Flexion**

A movement form in which the horse bends its body sideways. This is important for the development of the lateral trunk muscles and improves the flexibility of the spine.

### **Vertical Flexion**

A movement of the horse's head in the vertical plane, contributing to the development of neck muscles and promoting the stretching ability of the nuchal ligament.

## 1. 1. 3. Understanding Horse Body Language



Understanding horse body language is a fundamental skill for anyone working with horses. Horses primarily communicate through nonverbal signals [s10], with each part of their body conveying specific meanings. The position of the ears is one of the most important indicators of a horse's mood. Forward-facing ears signal attention and interest, while pinned-back ears may indicate discomfort or even aggressive tendencies [s11]. The impressive ability of horses to rotate their ears nearly 180 degrees not only allows for better auditory perception but also provides us with important clues about their current state. The position of the head also reveals much about the emotional state: a relaxed horse holds its head in a neutral position or slightly lowered. Conversely, if the head is held high and the neck tense, this often indicates heightened alertness or nervousness [s10]. During groundwork, it is essential to keep an eye on these signals—if the horse suddenly raises its head, it is advisable to scan the environment for potential stressors and consider taking a break. Particularly revealing are the so-called "Tells"—subtle physical signals that reveal the emotional state of the horse [s12]. A relaxed horse may, for example, play with its lips or chew lightly. If this behavior abruptly stops and the horse freezes, it could indicate a "freeze" response, often a precursor to a flight reaction. As herd animals with a strong flight instinct [s13], horses are very sensitive to the body language of their human partners. They perceive the slightest changes in our posture—from tension in the shoulders to the way we breathe. Therefore, when working with the horse, it is essential to be aware of one's own body language. A relaxed yet upright posture conveys confidence and calmness. The position of the tail also provides important clues: a loosely swinging tail indicates relaxation, while a tightly held or raised tail may signal excitement or stress [s10]. In groundwork, these signals should be interpreted in conjunction with other body signs—a raised tail along with tense nostrils could indicate an impending flight reaction. To improve communication, mirroring the horse's body language has proven to be an effective method [s10]. If the horse shows interest through forward ears and an attentive gaze, the trainer can subtly mimic this posture. This fosters mutual understanding and strengthens the bond. For successful groundwork, it is essential to recognize stress signals early [s14]. These include flared nostrils, tense muscles, or frequent tail swishing. Ignoring these signs can lead to problematic



behavior. An experienced trainer will reduce the intensity of exercises or take a break when such signals are observed. The ability to read the horse's body language enables the trainer to make informed decisions during training [s12]. This also means being flexible to the horse's needs and adjusting the training plan accordingly. A horse that signals overwhelm through its body language may require smaller training steps or more repetitions of already known exercises.



*Tail carriage* <sup>[i3]</sup>

## Glossary

### Tells

Specific, involuntary behaviors in horses that serve as early warning signs for mood changes, similar to poker, where certain gestures reveal a player's true intentions.

## 1. 1. 4. Safety during Groundwork



afety during groundwork is a fundamental aspect of handling horses that should never be underestimated. Due to their size, strength, and natural flight response, even well-trained horses can pose a risk in certain situations [s15]. One of the most important basic rules is the correct approach to the horse. The safest way is to approach the horse from the side, ideally at shoulder height. Direct approaches from the front or behind should be avoided [s16]. When leading the horse, a safety distance of about an arm's length should always be maintained to allow for a quick reaction in case of an emergency. One's own body language and emotional state play a crucial role in safety. Calm, controlled movements and a balanced emotional demeanor significantly contribute to safe handling [s17]. Hectic or aggressive behaviors can unsettle the horse and lead to dangerous situations. When working with unfamiliar horses, special caution is required. It is advisable to work the horse initially in a round pen or on a longe line to assess its temperament and any potential behavioral issues [s18]. Complete knowledge of the horse's history is invaluable in this context. An often-overlooked safety aspect concerns the handling of ropes and leads. These should never be dragged behind the horse, as the animal may become startled and panic if it notices the trailing object [s19]. Therefore, attention must always be paid to the correct position of the rope during directional changes. The basic training of the horse is fundamental to safety. Every horse should receive a solid foundational education based on the natural behaviors it has learned from its mother and herd [s20]. This includes safe leading, respectful behavior towards humans, and acceptance of basic handling measures. When feeding and handling multiple horses, special attention is required. Horses should be fed individually to avoid aggressive confrontations [s16]. The integration of new horses into an existing herd must be done gradually and under constant observation [s18]. A professional approach to the horse also means respecting its natural hierarchy while simultaneously setting clear boundaries [s20]. Inconsistent behavior or tolerating inappropriate behavior can lead to dangerous situations. Humans must take responsibility for the horse's behavior and provide safety through clear leadership. The use of treats should be well-considered. While they can be useful tools for catching difficult horses [s16], care must be taken to ensure that the horse does not become pushy or demanding. A clear system for rewards and strict

rules for feeding treats are essential. Recognizing and respecting the horse's "danger zones," particularly the hindquarters, is especially important [s15]. Safe handling of tools and equipment, as well as awareness of potential hazards in the environment, are additional critical safety aspects. The consistent application of these safety principles is not only important for immediate groundwork but also has a direct impact on the horse's behavior under saddle [s17]. A horse that is poorly trained on the ground will often exhibit these behaviors while being ridden.

## Summary - 1. 1. Groundwork with Horses

- A training halter made of 6mm double-braided polyester rope is particularly suitable for sensitive and untrained horses.
- An ideal working area for groundwork measures 40m x 20m.
- Colored beads or knots in the equipment serve for personalization and differentiation.
- The 'approach-and-retreat method' is central to desensitization with moving objects.
- The pressure point for the hindquarters turn is at the height of the horse's hip.
- Horses can rotate their ears by almost 180 degrees.
- Subtle physical signals from the horse are referred to as 'tells.'
- A sudden freezing and cessation of lip movement can indicate a 'freeze' reaction.
- Mirroring the horse's body language enhances communication.
- Flared nostrils and frequent tail swishing are important stress signals.
- Basic training builds on natural behaviors that the horse learns from its mother and herd.
- Poorly trained ground behavior often translates to behavior under saddle.

