# Horse handling and training series

## Part 1: Lunging – Summary

It is our responsibility as horse owners and trainers to have a good understanding of the horse’s natural behaviour for both the horse’s welfare and our own. It is easy to assume that horses are just like people and have the same needs. Anthropomorphism can lead to welfare issues. When we provide horses with what we think they need, we ignore what they actually need.

The horse has evolved physically and behaviourally to meet its primary instinct. Horses have evolved to run first (flight response) rather than to fight, and will only fight if they are in a position where they cannot run away. Educating horses primarily encompasses overcoming a horse’s flight response and training a horse to not react instinctively and run away.

One of the main obstacles seen when training horses is poor understanding of learning theory. The basic concepts of training include routine, habit, and consistency. The training principles covered in this series of videos can be applied to any discipline, breed, and level.

Teaching a horse to lunge is one of the first steps involved in horse education and is a fundamental foundation that aids in enhancing horse and handler welfare. Lunging is gaining respect, developing muscles and coordination, removing excess energy, and an opportunity to assess the soundness and mood of the horse, as well as enhancing focus.

### Lunging basics

Stick position when lunging should change depending on the required pace.

* Walk = low
* Trot = mid
* Canter = high

### Exercises

* Forward and around (stop and change direction)
* Forward and around (side pass)
* Forward and around (change direction without stopping)
* Forward and around (spreading the back end)
* Reverse spread.

**Forward and around**: Using the stick, the handler must take the front end away by moving the stick towards the horse’s eye and then moving it to between the butt of the tail and the hock to get forward movement. When the stick is closer to the horse, this results in faster movement. When the stick is further away from the horse, this results in slower movement.

To stop, move the stick in front of the horse. For an uneducated or out-of-control horse that may be putting the handler in danger, raising the stick higher will achieve a faster and more effective stop. The idea behind raising the stick higher in front of the horse is to make the handler seem taller than the horse, thus gaining respect from the animal and enhancing safety.

**Side pass**: Move the stick towards the girth and move your hand towards the eye for a side pass (horse moving away from the handler).

For each horse, there is position where the stick can be held that will make the horse move away/forwards. This is known as the **sweet spot**. For some horses, this may be very close; for others, it may be further away. The sweet spot is the position on an individual horse where the stick or hand can be held and the horse will move away or forwards at a consistent pace.

**Change direction**: To change direction, give direction with the lead rope hand to the desired direction, move the head and neck away, step in the direction you wish to go, and move the stick to the butt of the tail to gain forward movement.

The handler needs to stand behind the **crucifix**/behind girth area for forward movement.

Regarding the **handler position**, the handler’s hand must remain at the height of the horse’s eye. The pinkie finger on the lead rope hand must point in the direction you wish to go. Remain smooth with your hands and your feet.

**Change direction without stopping**:

1. Take the front end away and place the stick in trot position.
2. Move the stick into the lead rope hand (under rope) to maintain forward movement.
3. Move the stick hand over the lead rope hand and take the lead rope in the new direction.
4. The stick then comes under the rope and in behind the second eye (which was the outside eye) to take the front end away in the new direction.
5. Take the stick to the butt of the tail to continue forward movement.
6. Always try to keep the circle symmetrical around your cone.

**Disengaging the hind end**: Disengaging the hind end is a similar movement to a one rein stop and teaches the horse how to do a one rein stop from the ground. It helps to transfer the weight from the front end of the horse to the back end, which aids in balancing the horse and enhances performance. Being able to disengage the hind end of a horse enhances the welfare of the horse and the safety of the handler, as it provides an easy and safe method of stopping a horse’s movement quickly without much force.

To disengage the hind end, once the horse is moving around on the circle, the handler pulls the horse’s nose towards the butt of the tail, while stepping towards the butt of the tail with the corresponding foot to the lead rope hand. For example, if the lead rope is in the right hand, the handler steps first with the right foot) This will result in the horse’s hind end moving away from the handler until the horse is directly facing the handler. The handler must lower the stick, so that the horse does not continue to move forwards, and raise the lead rope hand in front of the horse’s face as the horse disengages, to prevent the horse stepping forward towards the handler. Once the horse is disengaged, the handler can change the direction or continue the same direction.

**Disengaging the hind end while moving forward**: Disengaging the hind end while moving forward requires the horse’s front legs to stay on the inside circle, while the hind legs travel around on larger circle. This movement aids in transferring weight from the front end to the hind end of the horse and helps to achieve greater balance. To achieve this, the handler keeps the direction hand up and pulls the nose slightly towards the butt of the tail, while keeping the stick in the trot position at the butt of the tail to continue forward movement. This results in the hind end travelling around on a larger circle in the disengaged position. To stop from this movement, to stop, the handler pulls the nose and steps towards the butt of the tail and lowers the stick.

To gain further respect and balance from the horse, the handler can take 2 steps towards the butt of the tail when disengaging the hind end to move the horse further away.

**Reverse spread**: The reverse spread is a good exercise to get control of the horse’s head, neck, rib cage, front end, and back end. The movement is similar to that of changing direction. The handler gets the horse moving around on the circle, places the stick into the lead rope hand under the lead rope, and takes the free hand that was holding the stick over the top and takes hold of the lead rope. The handler will then have arms crossed, holding the stick and the rope in opposite hands than usual. The handler then moves the stick closer to the butt of the tail to move the horse’s hind end out onto the larger circle, resulting in spreading the back end and trotting on two tracks (**two tracking**).

When using this exercise to change direction, keep the hands crossed, pull the nose to the direction you want to go, take the stick to the second eye (the outside eye), and take the front end away in the new direction.