

The Positive Riding System

The Student's Homework

By Henrik Johansen



Every time we work with a horse it is training, whether we are working with the horse ourselves, or the student himself is doing the work. Not all students are able to make decisions themselves about the type of work their horse needs at any particular time. And there are few students who know how to use their time constructively when working on their own.

It is important that we as trainers know what kind of work the horse has done since the last time we saw him. In addition, we should know what the student has been working on and thinking about. This is necessary to be able to plan the training so that the rider and trainer do not conflict with one another.

I have often taught lessons where I was very pleased with the results that we had achieved. I saw a bright future – the horse was capable, the rider understood, I was happy. But a week later in the next lesson, the story was different. What happened? I felt so positive, my head filled with pictures of a great future for my student and his horse. Where are the horse and rider I saw last week? I could try to ask the student this question but the answer would surely be negative, since my student already knows that he has gotten into trouble. This kind of experience reinforces how important it is for us to have a handle on how the horse and rider are working together when we are not there.

It is unavoidable that sometimes we have to start all over again, but we must do everything we can to prevent that from happening more than is absolutely necessary. When things do not go right for the student and his horse, it is not only the student that loses confidence, but

first and foremost the horse suffers. And we, as trainers, may also find it difficult to maintain a positive attitude with our teaching.

In order to achieve the best possible results, to keep things moving forward in a positive manner for horse, student and trainer, and to prevent the horse from becoming over-stressed, we must set goals, make plans and stick to them. It is our responsibility as trainers to set the goals, keep the student on track and to give him the necessary information in order to understand the goals and plans. It is important for the trainer and student to work together to prioritize and agree upon the type of work that should be done in between lessons. This process will encourage the student to take on some of the responsibility for his success and to feel that he is involved in the process. Planning the training and education of horse and rider so that it is clear to the student where to start, how to proceed, and what goals to work toward, generally makes it possible for the student to continue the work independently.

The New Student

When working with a new student, I begin by helping horse and rider to work together productively with their current level and abilities; I create a platform that will be a good starting point for them. The following steps will assist you:

- Acquire the necessary information to determine where horse and rider are in their training.
- Set a goal for the first part of the training (for example, for the next month).
- Decide how and what to do to reach that

- goal.
- Explain the resulting plan to the student.
- Make sure the student understands what his horse is supposed to do, the reason for it, and how to accomplish it.
- Teach the student how to warm up his horse, stride by stride, with the intention of making him responsible for the warm-up. It is essential that the horse is warmed up correctly since this is something that takes place every time the horse is ridden. If the horse is properly warmed up, if he is in balance, supple, goes honestly to the bit, and so on, then the rest of the time can be spent productively creating something new, and developing and advancing the horse's education.
- Give the student realistic assignments so that he has a fair chance of succeeding.

To be a truly successful trainer requires more than teaching a good lesson. We must involve and empower the student. I have no doubt that we will have the best results when:

- The student works the horse correctly, including the times he rides on his own.
- The student has the information he needs at hand.

- The student shares the responsibility.
- The student understands the difference between correct and incorrect.

As a result, the trainer will have time to concentrate on what should happen next, instead of wasting time focusing on what is happening here and now. When we are able to get this process to work so that the student develops in the proper direction and learns how to work independently, then I think we can say that we are successful.

In order to accomplish this, it is a very good idea to set long-term and short-term goals together with your student. Ask your student to read the chapters, [Planning your Training](#) and [Setting Goals](#). I also recommend using the forms, [Current Status Analysis](#), [Goals for the Horse](#), [Goals for the Rider](#) and [Workplan](#) to assist you. Feel free to print these forms as often as you'd like. If your student is more experienced, he can fill out the forms himself and discuss them with you afterwards.

The results of a lesson can vary a lot, but there is no doubt that good planning will greatly improve the chances for a positive outcome.