

Get the Most From Your Riding Lessons

Three ways to get the most from your riding lessons.

By Donna Snyder-Smith

Photo by Lesley Ward
People have different learning styles, some learn best by performing a task over and over, some with visual input (looking at an example), while others do well with spoken instruction.

1. Notice what approach gives YOU the best chance of retaining and understanding new information, then choose an instructor whose lessons emphasize that approach.

You can often double the value of your lesson dollars if you watch riders similar to your age and experience take a lesson, so:

2. Plan time in your schedule to take your paid riding lesson, then allocate additional time to audit the lesson of riders similar to yourself (age and skill level), or watch someone who is a slightly better rider take a lesson on a school horse you have previously ridden. This is especially helpful if you've had difficulty getting the horse to perform in a way you would have liked. Check with your instructor for advice on whom to observe.

The mind is a powerful tool which is often underused when we are learning to ride, because riding is considered a physical activity by most. Take advantage of your mind power:

3. Watch good riders videos, shows, training arena, et cetera. Don't try to dissect what they are doing, just let the "picture" imprint itself in your memory. When you are mounted, take a deep breath and "soak" yourself with the memory of that perfect picture. Don't compare yourself to the picture—rather, breathe and just ride your horse as if you were the rider in the remembered image. Trust the power of your mind to help train your body without you interfering by trying to keep a constant check on all the little details.

Further Reading

Getting Started with Horses: Lesson Programs

Evaluating Your Instructor

Donna Snyder-Smith is a long time equestrian arts instructor, author and journalist. She has won the American Riding Instructor Association's Lifetime Achievement Award, and gives national clinics featuring her "American System" which emphasizes the importance of understanding and utilizing correct biomechanical principals in the training of both rider and horse.