

Flawless Riding Position

Follow these ten tips to improve your western equitation.

By Ronda Quaid

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A good equitation rider will always stand out by creating the impression that horse and rider are one, riding effortlessly and effectively so that it appears he or she could just as easily be sitting up there having a cup of coffee as completing a horsemanship pattern. Accomplished eq riders have worked hard to achieve this. To get the most out of your practice, follow these tips: Don't stop riding when you use your reins. The horse must drive up to the hand. Don't let your energy drop just because you're giving a cue with the reins.

Let your seat find the saddle. Riders often come up out of the saddle. If this happens, think of pushing in with your belly button and find the saddle.

Keep your toes pointing forward, aligned with your horse's body, not pointing in or out or coming forward of the cinch.

Ride every day. Good equitation comes from muscle memory. You don't want to have to be constantly thinking about it.

Keep your lower back soft. It is the hinge that allows your pelvis to move with the horse's motion.

Shoulders must be stay level and aligned. Maintaining the proper hand and arm positions will help prevent your shoulders from twisting.

You have to be able to use your body parts separately; for example, you don't want your shoulder lifting when you lift your hand.

Rather than a solid curb bit, beginners should start with a loose jaw bit (cheekpieces of the bit are hinged) with a slobber chain, which gives some warning when the rein is used. Make sure you start your request by just taking out the slack and try to get a feel for the response. If you don't get the desired response, you can increase the pressure slowly with a bump, not a jerk. Jerking your horse is likely to adversely affect your body position, not to mention your horse's.

Keep your elbows bent and wrists straight and relaxed. If your arms are stiff you won't have the give and take you need to establish subtle communication with your horse's mouth.

Make your practice sessions challenging. Work on tasks that require coordination. Just sitting perfectly still constantly in one position makes a rider stiff. You want to be still, but not paralyzed. Think of it as flowing with the horse.

Ronda Quaid is a freelance writer and working toward perfecting her reined cow horse skills.

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