

EQU_020 Horse Handling, Husbandry, and Minor Procedures

I. OBJECTIVE

To establish expected standards for handling, husbandry and minor procedures using horses at UQ.

II. DEFINITIONS

Competent - “the consistent application of knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required regarding the care and use of animals. It embodies the ability to transfer and apply knowledge and skill to new situations and environments.” (as per, Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes, 2013)

III. COMMENTS / RECOMMENDATIONS

- Relative to animal ethics applications, when using this SOP, the following must be described in the individual ethics application: expected duration and frequency of animal use, and any variation to this SOP.
- Prior to the handling of a horse, the individual animal’s temperament, local environment factors, and the procedure or exposure this is to occur must be taken into consideration (e.g. loud and erratic noises should be avoided especially for nervous, flighty animals)
- It must be appreciated that the application of any kind of restraint to horses presents a risk to their welfare. As such, the use of animal restraint must only be performed, and to the minimum level considered necessary, to enable the safe conduct of a required procedure. For example, when performing vaccinations, the most appropriate method of restraint in a relatively quiet, mature mare may simply be the application of a halter, whereas, for a boisterous young colt this may also include application of a skin twitch.
- Levels of physical restraint in order of increasing severity are considered as follows: head halter, snaffle bit, rearing bit, chain shank, skin twitch, ear twitch, nose twitch.
- Supplementary to the use of physical restraint is the use of chemical restraint (performed in consultation with a veterinarian). If chemical restraint is routinely required for basic, minimally invasive procedures, the horse should not be used for scientific purposes without specific justification

IV. PROCEDURES

1. [Catching a horse and applying a halter](#)
2. [Safely releasing a horse](#)
3. [Tying up](#)
4. [Leading a horse](#)
5. [Leading through gates](#)
6. [Applying a rump rope](#)
7. [Picking up a front hoof](#)
8. [Picking up a hind hoof](#)
9. [Picking out a hoof](#)
10. [Applying hoof testers](#)
11. [Applying a rug and removing a rug](#)
12. [Positioning a handler](#)
13. [Restraint: Nose twitch](#)
14. [Restraint: Skin hold](#)
15. [Restraint: Ear twitch](#)
16. [Restraint: Rearing bit](#)
17. [Restraint: Chain shank](#)
18. [Bandaging a limb](#)
19. [Tail bandage](#)

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1. Catching a Horse and Applying a Halter

Why?

To be able to safely handle a horse

How

1. Firstly, examine the halter and hold correctly. The shorter strap, when done up, goes over the horse's nose. The longer strap, when done up, goes over the horses poll, behind his ears. All straps will do up from the left, or near, side. The lead-rope should hang ventrally, attached to the ring that will sit under the horses chin
2. Before approaching the horse ensure the nose strap is done up, the head strap is undone, and the lead-rope is securely attached to the halter. Place the halter on your shoulder and ensure no ropes are dragging on the ground
3. Approach the horse calmly and quietly from the front and a little to the side, preferably from the left, or near, side. Never approach a horse from behind!
4. Place the lead-rope around the horses neck
5. Slide the nose-piece of the halter up onto the horse's nose with the buckles facing left and the leadrope hanging ventrally.
6. Pass the head-strap over the horse's poll and do the halter up so it sits snugly on the horse's head, but not too tight. The nose-strap should be sitting just below the horse's zygomatic arch, and not too low down over his nostrils
7. Pass the head-strap over the horse's poll and do the halter up so it sits snugly on the horse's head, but not too tight. The nose-strap should be sitting just below the horse's zygomatic arch, and not too low down over his nostrils



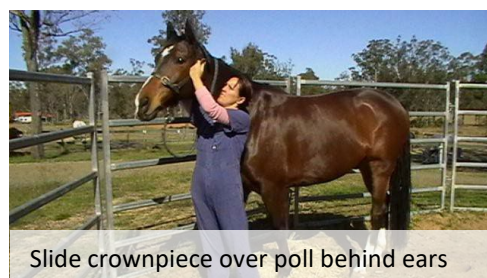
Approach horse



Place leadrope around neck



Slide nosepiece over horses nose



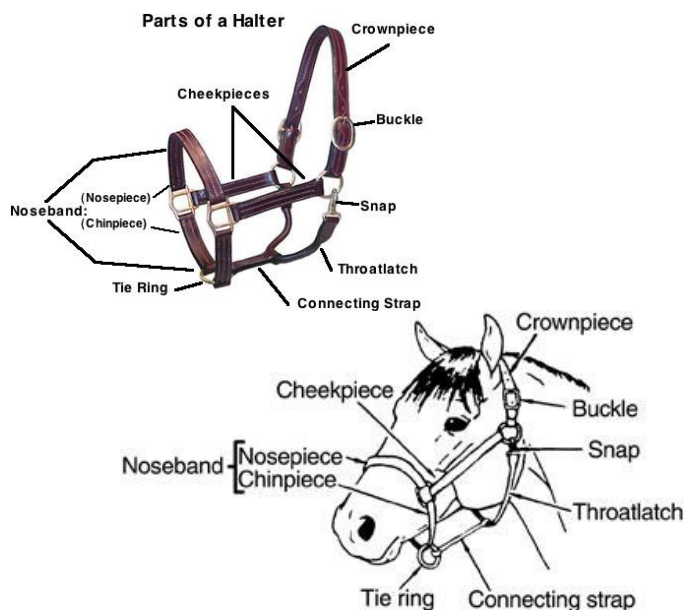
Slide crownpiece over poll behind ears



Buckle up crownpiece firmly



Remove leadrope from around neck and hold



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2. Safely releasing a horse

Why?

To be able to safely release a horse into his enclosure

How

1. Lead the horse away from the gate, either into the middle of a yard, or if he's to be released into a paddock, lead him approximately 10m away from the gate.
2. Turn the horse to face the gate
3. Place the lead rope around the horse's neck near the poll and hold both ends firmly
4. Undo the head piece of the halter and slide it off the horse's nose
5. Gently slide the rope away from the horse's neck, taking care not to drop it on the ground
6. Step away from the horse and walk briskly back to the gate



Place leadrope around neck



Unbuckle crownpiece



Slide halter off nose



Remove leadrope from around neck

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3. Tying a Horse Up

Why?

To be able to safely restrain a horse for examination or procedure

How –Quick Release Knot

Horses should always be tied up with a quick release knot in order to be able to untie them quickly in an emergency. There are many ways to tie a horse with a quick release, this is just one example

1. Locate a suitable non-moveable structure, such as a well built fence or poll. Never tie a horse to any moveable object!
2. Always tie a horse to something strong but breakable, such as a piece of twine
3. Make a loop in the lead-rope approximately 45cm from the horse's head
4. Pass the tip of the loop through your baling twine and twist the loop once
5. Make a second loop in your lead-rope next to the first one in the free end of the rope. Pass this second loop through your first one, then pull on the horse-end of the rope to tighten
6. To untie the horse quickly, pull on the long end of the rope



Twist leadrope loop



Pull a loop of free end through your loop



Quick release knot



Correct length of leadrope from tie to horse



Too much length, horse can get leg over rope or head underneath



Rope over poll, horse will panic and pull back



Make a loop in the leadrope



Pass loop through baling twine

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4. Leading a Horse

Why?

To move a horse from paddock to place of examination and vice versa, and to examine a horse's gait for soundness

How

1. Standing at the horse's left, or near, shoulder facing cranially with your body lateral to the horse at all times
2. Hold the lead-rope with your right hand 20-30cm from the horse's chin, and the rest of the lead-rope folded up in your left hand.
Never wrap the lead-rope around your hand! Make sure none of the lead-rope is trailing in the ground
3. Looking straight ahead, give the horse a signal to move forward (this can be a click of the tongue, a "hup", or whatever you want to use), and begin to move forward. The horse should walk politely beside you, and not be dragging behind or pulling in front. Try to keep him so you're standing slightly in front of his shoulder at all times.
4. If he's lagging behind, give him a little flick under the belly with the long end of your lead rope and another "hup"
5. If he's pulling, give him a little 'pull and release', or 'check' on the rope. Repeat these little 'checks' until he walks politely next to you. Don't get into a tug-of-war with him, he's much stronger than you
6. To stop, stop walking, pull and release on the lead-rope, and say 'woah'
7. To turn, if possible always try to turn the horse AWAY from you rather than towards you, so you stay outside him as he turns. To turn right, use your right hand to 'pull' the horse's head to the right, and hold your left hand up to where he can see it, and give him a 'hup'. To turn left, keep the horse walking forward and using your right hand, pull the horse's head towards you. Don't make the turn too sharp, or he'll lean into you and could knock you over
8. To lead a horse in trot, stand at the horse's left, or near, shoulder facing forward. Looking straight ahead, start walking briskly forward,

then give the horse another click with your tongue, or "hup". If he doesn't trot, give him a little flick under the belly with the long end of the lead-rope. Once he's trotting, run very forward and straight to encourage the horse to make big active strides. To stop, stop running, say "woah" and give a little check on the lead-rope



Lead the horse from his left hand side



Stand just behind the horse's head, in front of his shoulder. Keep one hand holding the lead rope under his chin, and the other holds the remainder of the rope and stops it dragging on the ground



Stand just behind the horse's head, in front of his shoulder. Keep one hand holding the lead rope under his chin, and the other holds the remainder of the rope and stops it dragging on the ground

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5. Leading a Horse Through Gates

Why?

To move a horse from paddock to place of examination and vice versa safely

How

1. Always try to open the gate in the direction the horse is travelling ie moving into the yard, open the gate in to the yard, and vice versa. If the gate is not open wide enough for the horse's hips and he gets a fright and rushes through the gate will just push further open and cause the horse no harm. If the gate is opened towards the horse, opposite of the direction of travel, and he gets a fright the gate will close in on him and damage his hips
2. If the gate only opens towards the horse, make sure the gate is open very wide so the horse will not catch his hips on the way through
3. Always be aware of other horses in the yard
4. Try to keep one hand on the gate at all times for expedited closure
5. Only open the gate wide enough for the horse to safely navigate the opening
6. Always close gates behind you!



Always open the gate in the direction the horse is travelling



If the gate will only open towards the horse, make sure the gate is open very wide

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6. Applying a rump rope

Why?

To teach a young horse to lead, and to encourage a horse that is reluctant to be led to safely move forward

How

1. The idea is to create a large loop in the end of a long piece of rope that will sit around the rump of the horse with a single lead back to the handler of the horse at the horse's head
2. Either: Tie a loop in the end of the rope and slide the other end through the loop
3. OR: Lay the rope around the back end of the horse and tie a bowline knot near the horse's shoulder
4. As you click the horse to walk forward and apply gentle forward pressure to the halter lead, also pull gently on the rump rope
5. As soon as the horse responds by taking a step forward, release the pressure on the rope

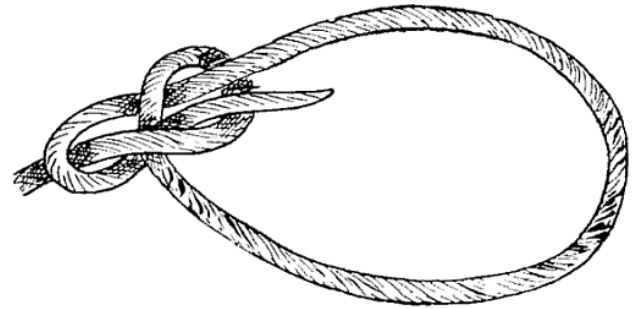


Fig. 1 - Bowline

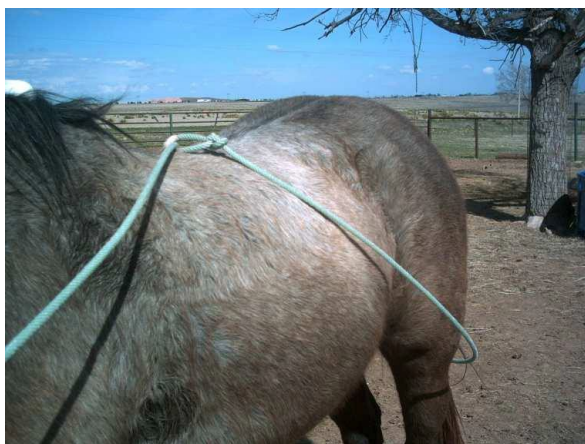
A completed bowline knot



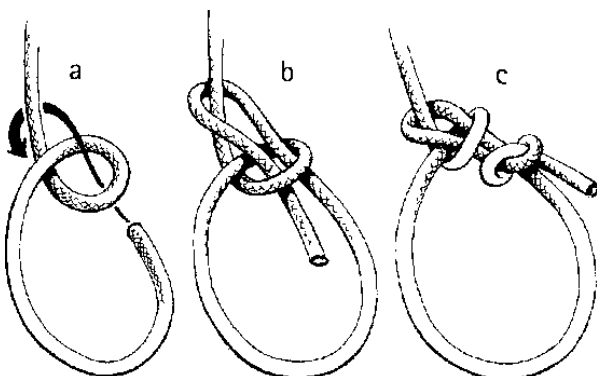
Asking the horse to lead forward with the voice and halter, apply pressure with the rump rope



As soon as the horse walks forward, release the pressure on the rump rope and halter



Rump rope passed through a loop



Tying a bowline knot

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7. Picking up a Front Hoof

Why?

- To clean the hoof for examination
- To examine the hoof
- To test the hoof for pain
- To remove a shoe or file a hoof as part of a lameness exam

How

1. Standing at the horse's shoulder facing caudally with your feet lateral to the horse at all times
2. Run the hand adjacent to the horse down the palmar aspect of his leg from shoulder to fetlock
3. Give the fetlock a squeeze at the same time as applying a gentle lean into the horse with your shoulder
4. When the horse picks up his hoof support it at the level of the pastern
5. Pass the hoof between your legs from behind and hold it between your thighs with your knees and toes pointing together
6. To place the hoof back down, remove it from between your thighs, and hold it around the pastern. Gently place the hoof back on the ground



Stand at the horse's shoulder



Run your hand down the forearm



Squeeze the fetlock



Lift up the hoof



Support the hoof at the pastern

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Pass the hoof behind your thigh and between your legs



To place the foot on the ground again, pass the hoof back out from between your legs



Step over the hoof



Support the limb at the pastern



Hold the hoof between your thighs for examination



Gently place the hoof back on the ground

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8. Picking up a Hind Hoof

Why?

- To clean the hoof for examination
- To examine the hoof
- To test the hoof for pain
- To remove a shoe or file a hoof
- As part of a lameness exam

How

1. Standing at the horse's shoulder facing caudally with your feet lateral to the horse at all times
2. Run the hand away from the horse across the horse's back, down his hamstrings, down the plantar aspect of his hindleg to his fetlock
3. Gently pull the hoof cranially towards you
4. When the horse appears settled, walk the hoof back, supporting the fetlock and pastern at all times. Gentle flexion on the fetlock stops the horse snatching his hoof back
5. Standing with knees firmly together and legs slightly bent, place the leg over the lateral aspect of your thighs and support the hoof by resting it against your legs mid-thigh
6. To place the hoof back down, support the limb at the pastern, and walk the leg back cranially. Gently place the limb on the ground and step away from the horse



Supporting the fetlock, pull the leg up towards you



Wait for the horse to relax, then supporting with both hands walk the leg back



Wait for the horse to relax, then supporting with both hands walk the leg back



Stand well forward, run your hand over the rump



Run your hand down the thigh to the fetlock



Standing pigeon-toed, support the limb over the dorsal aspect of your thighs

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Standing pigeon-toed, support the limb over the dorsal aspect of your thighs



To release the limb, remove it from your thighs then walk back towards the head, supporting the limb the whole time



Place the limb gently on the ground

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9. Picking out a Hoof

Why?

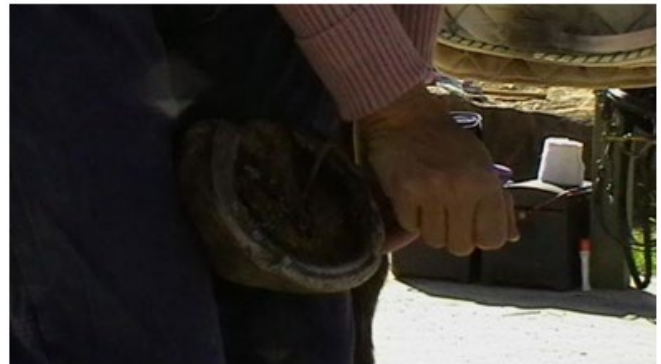
- To clean the hoof for xray or examination

How

1. Pick up the horse's hoof and hold it as described
2. Beginning at the heel bulbs, pick the dirt out of the hoof in a heel to toe direction, being sure to clean all the mud and stones from the sulci
3. Avoid cleaning vigorously over the frog proper



- *Starting at the heel bulbs, clean the hoof in a heel to toe direction*



- *Starting at the heel bulbs, clean the hoof in a heel to toe direction*



- *Starting at the heel bulbs, clean the hoof in a heel to toe direction*

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10. Hoof Testing

Why?

- To test the hoof for pain
- As part of a lameness exam

How

1. Pick up the horse's hoof and hold it as described
2. In a systematic manner, apply the hoof testers to the entire sole and frog region and hoof wall, taking care that the arm of the hoof tester is not being applied to the soft tissue of the coronary band
3. Begin with a gentle application, then increase pressure to a firmer application of the hoof testers



- *Hoof testers*



- *Holding a forefoot for examination*



- *Holding a hind foot for examination*



- *Correct application of hoof testers*

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11. Applying and Removing a Rug

Why?

- To keep the horse clean and reduce the horse's sud
- To keep insects off him
- To examine the horse

How – Applying the rug

1. Firstly, orientate the rug. Leg straps originate from horse-side of the rug, chest strap does up around the front of the horse.
2. Fold the rug in half cranio-caudally
3. Approach the horse calmly and quietly at the shoulder
4. Gently slide the rug up and over his withers and orientate it so its lying over his back folded in half cranio-caudally
5. Unfold the rug so it lies in-situ
6. Always do up the back straps before the chest strap so if the horse gets a fright and runs away half way through being rugged he can just kick the rug off, and not break the rug or his legs
7. Do up the near strap first by looping it around the left, or near, hind leg
8. Move to the off side of the horse, and do up the right, or off, strap by looping it around the off hind leg, taking care to loop the second strap through the first strap so the y cross around each other between the horses legs. This helps to stop the rug from slipping
9. Move to the front of the horse and do up the chest strap so the rug sits firmly, but not too tight, and not too far back behind his withers



- Orientate the rug



- Fold the rug in half



- Approach the horse cautiously and slide the rug gently onto his withers



- Approach the horse cautiously and slide the rug gently onto his withers



- Unfold the rug over his body



- Unfold the rug over his body

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- *Pass the leg strap between the horses leg from the cranial aspect*



- *Buckle the front of the rug*



- *Buckle the leg strap caudally*



- *Pass the second strap between the legs from cranial to caudal*



- *Pass the second strap through the loop of the first strap and buckle*

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How – Removing the rug

1. Undo the chest strap first. Always undo the chest strap before the leg straps so if the horse gets a fright and runs away half way through being rugged he can just kick the rug off, and not break the rug or his legs
2. Move to the back of the horse. Undo the first leg strap, un-loop it from the other strap, remove it from around the leg and fasten it back up again so it doesn't hit the horse in the legs and startle him. Repeat with the other leg strap
3. Fold the rug up cranio-caudally
4. Slide the rug gently and quietly off the horse



- To remove the rug undo the chest strap first



- Undo the leg straps, remove from around the legs and re-buckle so the straps don't hit the horse as you remove the rug



- Undo the leg straps, remove from around the legs and re-buckle so the straps don't hit the horse as you remove the rug



- Undo the leg straps, remove from around the legs and re-buckle so the straps don't hit the horse as you remove the rug



- Fold the rug back toward the withers



- Slide the rug off the withers

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12. Positioning a Handler

Why?

- To safely hold a horse for procedure or restraint

How

1. Always stand lateral to the horse at his head ON THE SAME SIDE as the person performing the procedure/examination
2. Keep one eye on both the horse and the examiner at all times to be aware of both what is about to happen to the horse, and how the horse is dealing with it
3. The closer you are to the horse, the safer you are. The momentum gained in a kick or strike over distance is far greater than that when you are directly adjacent to the horse
4. NEVER stand directly in front of the horse
5. NEVER sit down near a horse
6. NEVER squat behind a horse
7. NEVER let a horse graze while someone is examining it
8. ALWAYS allow plenty of room between horses



- NEVER SIT DOWN NEAR A HORSE!!



- NEVER PLACE YOUR HEAD IN FRONT OF HIS LEGS!!



- Stand on the same side of the horse as the person performing the examination or procedure and keep an eye on both the horse and examiner



- NEVER STAND DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF A HORSE!!



- Stand on the same side of the horse as the person performing the examination or procedure and keep an eye on both the horse and examiner



- NEVER PLACE YOUR HEAD UNDER THE ABDOMEN OF A HORSE!!

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- **NEVER SQUAT BEHIND A HORSE!!**

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13. Restraint (nose twitch)

Why?

- To restrain the horse for examination and procedures

How

1. Always check with the owner if the horse has been twitched before
2. Orientate the nose twitch so it sits over your thumb and runs between your 3rd and pinkie fingers
3. Grip the horse's nose firmly between your thumb and 3rd finger just below the opening of the nares
4. Slide the rope of the twitch over your thumb and 3rd finger, and still maintaining a firm grip on the nose, twist the twitch until the rope is firm around the horse's nose
5. Place two half hitches over the handle of the twitch and hold it firmly against the horse's head
6. Only maintain for 5 mins maximum before allowing the horse a break

(NB: It is recommended that this procedure be performed by two people: one person applies the nose twitch and holds the halter, while the other holds the lead shank and twitch. Both stand clear of the animal's strike zone with its front feet.)



- Slide rope over fingers onto nose, still maintaining grip on the horses nose



- Begin to twist handle until rope on nose is very firm



- Hold the twitch between third and fourth fingers and around thumb



- Grip horses nose with thumb and third finger



- Correctly applied nose twitch

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14. Restraint (Skin hold)

Why?

- To restrain the horse for examination and procedures

How

1. Grab a large pinch of skin from the loose skin in the middle of the horse's neck, and gently twist



• *Skin hold/twitch*

15. Restraint (Ear Twitch)

Why?

- To restrain the horse for examination and procedures
- For young horses only

How

1. Firmly grip the ear of the horse and apply a gentle twisting motion
2. For very young horses only – better methods of restraint are available with mature horses



• *Ear hold/twitch*

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16. Restraint (Rearing bit)

Why?

- To restrain the horse for examination and procedures
- For better control when leading or handling

How

1. Stand next to the horse's head on his near side, hold the head piece of the rearing bit in your right hand and the bit in your left hand with the lead rope ring sitting ventrally
1. Place your right arm over the horse's poll, and sit the bit in between his lips at the occlusion of his incisors with your left hand
2. Using your left thumb, gently press down on the gum in the diastema. As the horse opens his mouth use your right hand to pull the bit between his teeth and pass the head piece first over the off-side ear, then the near side ear
3. When fitted correctly there should be 2 small wrinkles of the commissures of lips on both sides.
4. NEVER TIE A HORSE UP WITH THE LEAD ROPE ATTACHED TO THE REARING BIT



- Other hand places the mouthpiece against the incisors



- Gently press thumb into diastema to stimulate horse to open mouth



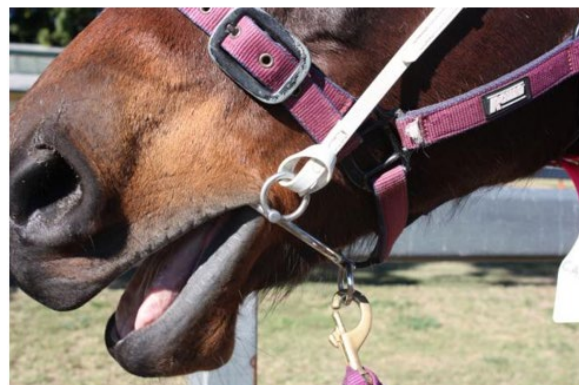
- Orientate the rearing bit first



- Pass the headpiece over the ears, tighten the buckle until two wrinkles appear in the commissure of the lips



- One hand over horses head to 'pull' bit into mouth



- Attach the leadrope to the leadrope clip

Conditions:

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17. Restraint (Chain Shank)

Why?

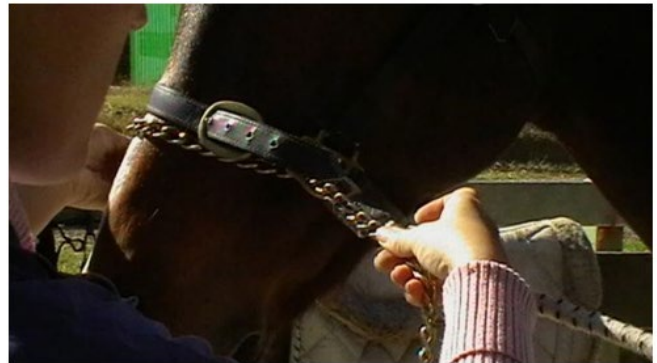
- To restrain the horse for examination and procedures
- For better control when leading or handling

How

1. Pass the chain clip through the near side D-ring on the halter
2. Pass the chain either over or under the horses nose
3. Do the chain up to the off side D-ring
4. Attach the lead rope to the free end of the chain
5. NEVER TIE A HORSE UP WITH THE LEAD ROPE ATTACHED TO THE CHAIN



- Pass the chain clip through the near-side halter D-ring



- Pass the chain over or under the horse's nose



- Attach the chain clip to the offside D-ring



- Attach the leadrope to the end of the chain

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18. Bandaging: Limb Bandage

Why?

- To bandage a wound
- To support an injured limb
- For travel or exercise
- To reduce limb oedema in prolonged stabled horses

How

1. Place some supportive padding against the limb to reduce pressure
2. Try to unwind the bandage in the same
3. direction of wrapping as the padding to 'lock' the padding down securely with less uneven areas
4. After placing the first wrap of the bandage, bandage make sure you conceal the end under the bandage so it doesn't become loose and the horse stand on it
5. Try to bandage in a distal to proximal direction to force fluid up the limb and avoid oedema distally
6. Bandage firmly, but not too constrictive



- *Bandaging against the direction of padding will loosen the padding and create unevenness*



- *Starting at the fetlock, bandage distal to proximal to reduce peripheral oedema*



- *Place padding around the horses limb first to reduce pressure*



- *Always bandage in the direction of wrapping of the padding*



- *Correctly applied bandage for travel, exercise or stabling*

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19. Bandaging: Tail Bandage

Why?

- To keep the tail hairs out of the way during rectal examination
- For travel

How

1. Place on end of the bandage on the horses rump
2. Slide the bandage under the tail as high as possible
3. Commence bandaging the tail firmly, but not too constrictive
4. Fold the loose end down, then wrap the bandage around it to secure the bandage
5. Continue bandaging down the tail to the bottom of the horse's dock
6. To remove the bandage simply slide off



- Place the bandage over the horse's rump



- Begin bandaging at the base of the horse's dock



- Begin bandaging at the base of the horse's dock



- Fold the end of the bandage down



- Bandage over it to lock it in place



- Continue bandaging down to the end of the dock

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Version #	Reviewing AEC (note: all other relevant AECs ratify the approval)	AEC Review Date	Approval To Date
1	PCA	15/06/2022	15/06/2025

Conditions:

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