

Keeping the Balance

For most things we teach, we have to also teach a counter-balancing task.

If we teach 'head down please', we also need to teach 'head up please'.

If we teach 'back up please', we need to teach, 'come forward please'.

If we teach targeting a mat with the front feet, we have to teach happily stepping off the mat and walking away from it. Some horses get VERY attached to their mat.

If we teach a turn followed by a 'halt', we have to teach a turn followed by a brisk 'walk on please'.

If we teach entering a trailer, we need to carefully teach exiting the trailer.

If we teach the horse to ground tie, we perhaps also need to teach him how to move with a dragging rope in a way so he doesn't step on it or become frightened by it.

If we teach the horse to come to us when we are playing at liberty, we also need to teach him to go away from us in a way that is fun rather than punishing. The outskirts of the herd is not where horses want to be. In their world view it's the place of greatest personal danger.

If we teach a move on one side of the horse, we need to teach it again from the other side of the horse. Maybe also from in front of the horse and from behind the horse.

If we don't do these things, the horse will become fixated on a task, be determined that he'll always do it this way, and the click/treat dynamic can work against us rather than for us.

So for everything we teach, we need to counterbalance it. How much we do of each thing depends on many factors. As we get better at understanding our horse and the possibilities that clicker training presents, it will be easier to know when we've done too much of one thing. We'll find it easier and easier to keep a better balance between tasks as we expand our repertoire of behaviours. Our skills develop with experience plus trial and error. Or even better, with trial and success.



If we teach a good 'halt' signal, we need to teach an equally good 'walk on' signal.

If we teach a signal for sticking with us at liberty, we need to teach an equally good signal if we want him to work away from us at liberty.