

Sylvia Training Her Two-Year-Old Tri-Colored Buckskin Paint, Doc

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Catching in Pasture/Haltering the horse

Horses are "Prey Animals," so when approaching a horse in pasture, don't approach like a "predator" (i.e., a predator stares directly and intensely at the "prey" when approaching). Instead, keep your eyes averted, your eyes and head down, stature bent/lowered, if necessary, to appear less threatening, but approach confidently and casually. You'll find your horse much easier to approach and halter or bridle, if you approach him on the side, at the point of the shoulders, and make the first touch of communication there, rather than going to the head first. Horses don't see as well in front of them as they do from the side, so stand off to his side instead of directly in front of him or else he will invariably raise his head out of your reach. When you reach the horse, bring the rope confidently under his neck and around so that if the horse moves off, you've still got control, and the horse contained, with the rope around the neck. **To read more about horse vision, which will help you tremendously in approaching a pastured horse [CLICK HERE](#).**



When haltering the horse, teach him to lower his head and bend his neck towards you before tying the halter on. Have him put his own nose into the halter himself. You can use your right hand on the opposite side of the horse's head and face to help with the bending pressure, or you can use the rope, as I'm doing here, to apply pressure and then release the pressure the second he gives a bend-try. **All of natural horsemanship is pressure and release (from pressure). The**

horse learns through the release of pressure what it is you want, not from the pressure itself. Here I'm holding the pressure until Doc gives me a bend again, and then I release when he gives it. Be careful of your own stature when asking with pressure. **Always keep soft eyes, soft body.** The "*pressure/release dance*" should go like this at all times in every training situation: **Ask, Anticipate** (it happening), **Compliance** (on the horse's part), **Release** (the pressure), **Reward**.

Take the try. **Look for the smallest try, the slightest change**, and then reward instantly with the release.

Here Doc is holding his head patiently still, inviting the halter, so I'm "taking the try" for this early-on-in-his-training learning curve, and am tying the halter.



Doing better. The goal is to have the horse keep his head lower than yours and to bring his head all the way over to the side, remaining in that position until the halter is on, but I'm "taking the try" for this time. **Accept Baby Steps.**

Reward for getting it right! Reward Baby Steps always. **Rewarding the horse every time he gets things right speeds up the learning process by 60%!**



Bonding With The Horse



After haltering the horse, immediately bond with him before asking any more of him. Rub on the face, behind the ears, in the hollow under the neck, all the places that might be itchy. **Don't "pat" a horse; they prefer to be rubbed, stroked and scratched.** Patting is a man-made gesture, not part of a horse's natural language. Rubbing they recognize in their own language, especially on the neck, since a

mother horse constantly licks her foal on the neck for comfort, reassurance and bonding. Rubbing/stroking is translated as licking and affection to a horse. Patting is nothing they recognize, though most indeed learn to tolerate it; it's just not their favorite gesture of affection or reward. So, rub, don't pat. During bonding, love on him bigtime! This is about giving before requesting anything. **A horse is far more willing to work (play!) with you if you start every lesson with bonding, and you will make an excellent first impression (every day!).**

Most horses love to have their eyes rubbed! Cup your hand over an eye and rub gently (much like you would rub your own itchy eyes, and you know how good that feels!).

Horses can't rub their own eyes and most are delighted to have this done for them, and often it's a first-time experience for them. **This bonds them even more deeply to you.** You can also rub inside or behind their ears if they like that and inside their nose, which is often another new-to-them place that feels good. These are all places they can't reach themselves to scratch and they usually welcome the feel.





Beside the eye, on the cheek is another favorite place to scratch/rub on. Note the relaxed pleasure in Doc's eyes here as he "let's down," and he releases all tension. **Relaxation and gratitude is a typical response to this bonding method and a great way to start every lesson!**

As you bond, take mental notes of all the horse's favorite spots (each horse is a unique individual!) so that you can always return to those particular spots for re-bonding if the horse is ever frightened, confused, or generally upset about anything. Bringing them back to bonding, that safe and loving place, whenever needed, is bringing them back to a comfort zone where they feel protected and nurtured, and trust builds tenfold via this route.



As you bond, you'll notice the horse beginning to relax more and soon ready to give back, **and he will try harder to learn what it is you want him to learn.**

After you've bonded, slowly move the horse's head so that he softens and gets ready for learning to yield his neck.



Teaching Head Yielding: Lowering the Head



A lowered head is a relaxed horse; a high head is a tense, "on alert" horse, so it's important to teach the horse to lower his head (relax!) on cue. While still rubbing on the horse (bonding), ease into encouraging the horse to yield his head and neck by slowly applying pressure downward with the lead rope. Don't jerk the rope! Simply apply steady downward pressure. The second the horse gives an inch, release the pressure, allowing baby steps (even a small

try) to be acceptable. **The horse learns through the release**, not the pressure, what it is you want: a lowered and softly yielding neck and head. Step by step.

Squatting on the ground lowers your stature, which makes you appear less threatening to the horse, and it also encourages the horse to lower his head to "check you out down there!" (I'm squatting here.) While squatting, apply slow, steady pressure downward on the lead rope until the horse gives even an inch and then release, getting that timing very accurate and refined.



Keep this up until the horse's head reaches the ground (I'm squatting here). **Then reward and love on the horse from down low,** as I'm doing here. This makes lowering the head a pleasurable experience for the horse. And Doc is learning to yield his neck softly at the same time.

To help the horse relax and to facilitate head lowering or yielding better, stick a finger in the corner of his mouth and this triggers the horse to work his mouth, lick his lips. This is especially effective if you ever get "stuck" in neck-yielding lessons. When a horse is working his mouth (naturally) he is saying "I understand/I get it/Okay, I'll relax/You're the leader." When *you* manufacture this mouth-working yourself by sticking a finger in the corner of his mouth, feathering the tongue, while still applying downward pressure on the rope (remove your finger once he starts working the mouth), this accomplishes the same thing: he relaxes and lets his neck go looser. This helps the horse to make a better mental connection between the pressure on the rope and relaxing his neck, "giving." **A Note: horses are rarely being stubborn; they are simply sometimes**



"stuck." Remember that and help nurture them through the stuck spot, compassionately.



Here Doc is working his mouth after I have stuck a finger in the corner. This is not just a one-time technique, but also a great "horse whispering" tip in general to help relax a tense horse at any time! Their mind follows their body in this case. **Working the mouth relaxes them, so you facilitate the relaxation artificially with this "tool."**

To further help the horse learn that pressure downward should translate to lowering the head, you also can apply slow, steady pressure to the top of the head, but release the pressure the second the horse gives even an inch. And repeat. Until the head is completely down. **The horse must experience the release of your pressure** (even each step of the way, if needed), or he will not understand what it is you want and will only learn to resist. Repeat: **the horse learns the correct response ONLY through the release of pressure.**

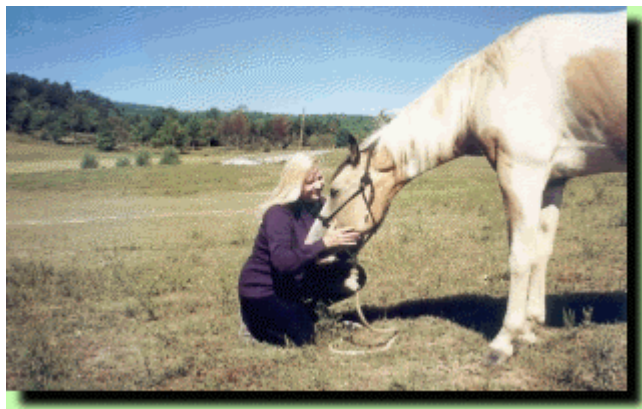




Get the horse accustomed to an arm around the neck, where this gives him an opportunity to see you from his other eye as well. Horses only see for the most part what is on either side of them (not directly behind them, nor directly in front of them, which are their blind spots) because their eyes are on the sides of their heads, not in front together like ours are. And there is a reason for this: horses are prey animals, while man

technically is a predator. All prey animals have their eyes on the sides of their heads so that they can see farther around them to the sides, to watch for a potential predator attack. Because horses are flight animals, some can get suddenly startled if "something" appears "out of nowhere" on their off-eye (the outside eye), so **get him used to seeing you on BOTH sides of him, at the same time, as often as you can;** this will translate over to later when you are in the saddle. Deep down, in their basic instinct level is this fact: The only time they are generally approached/touched on both sides at the same time (in the wild) is during a predator attack! So doing this exercise as often as you can also helps to create a more self-confident, fear-free, trusting horse. **To read more about horse vision, which will help you tremendously in understanding the "both sides approach" [CLICK HERE](#).** Young horses, like Doc is, sometimes especially need to get familiar with this "both sides" desensitization. **Rub on them while you are doing this, so that the experience is pleasurable and they learn to welcome it;** encourage them to drop their heads as well while doing this.

Squatting while encouraging the horse's head to come down speeds the yielding-understanding process along tremendously. Your lowered stature also shifts a horse's mind to a more willing, softer place, especially if you ever get to a "stuck" spot in this lesson. Their mind follows their body. Try it! You'll see. **Note: With wilder or more wired horses, always squat to the side to remain safest.**





Squatting isn't just a one-time technique, either, but use it often. It's amazing how approaching a horse from this non-threatening, non-predatory position can shift their minds softly, often instantly, whenever needed. Remember though: If you're dealing with a skittish or "hotter" horse, squat to the side of them, facing forward, not in front. Doc is a mellow guy by nature, so I can squat anywhere around him

safely. Remember to love on them from this position, rubbing their favorite spots! Doc is actually NOT eating grass here. He's choosing to be loved-on instead. Ahhhh...

Teaching Head Yielding: To The Side



To teach head yielding to the side, grasp the horse's nose by the "handle" on either side of the nose (the bony bridge) and apply pressure in the direction you wish the horse's head to turn. The second the horse gives even an inch, release the pressure. **The horse learns to yield through the release of pressure**, not necessarily the pressure, so get that release timing slit-second accurate.

Keep working, encouraging the horse to bring the head over, releasing pressure when you get what you want, but accepting baby steps ("the try") to get there. **Reward for the smallest try, the slightest change.**



You can help the neck yield by applying pressure and rubbing on the opposite side of the neck if needed. Being rubbed



on the "outside" helps a horse to release those neck muscles and yield better. These yielding lessons are simply the foundation, which will later translate over to understanding reins. Later, when in saddle, you can return to rubbing the outside neck to help with an opposite-side yield, whenever needed, and he will understand that cue better.

Doc's neck gets softer and softer as we go here. It's taking less and less pressure as he's making the pressure/release mental connection. Don't force the head over. Simply hold the pressure steady and release when he "gives." However, **never release the pressure when they are "fighting" against it** (for example, if they are trying to jerk away), or else the horse will have learned through a release then that fighting-it works.

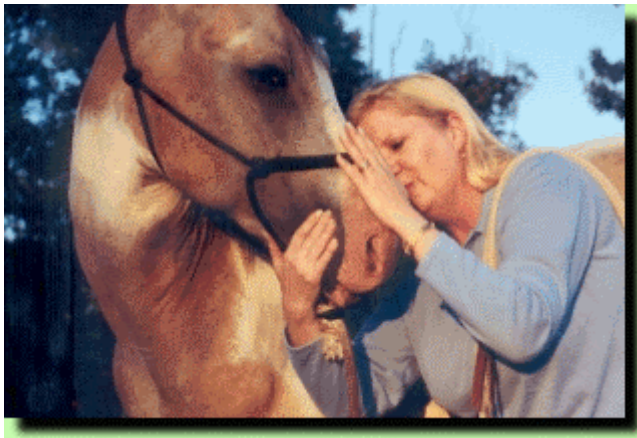


Just hold the pressure and release when he gives, even if you have to circle with the "fighting-it" horse in the beginning! But even then, remember to perceive/release at the slightest give, the tiniest try on the horse's part. **Reward the smallest try, the slightest change** and you'll get there faster and easier. Take baby steps as acceptable!



Frequently, **it helps to lower your head, lowering your stature, as well, in the area you wish to bring the horse's head over to;** this helps the horse to understand where he's supposed to be going.

Another "horse whispering" technique is, once the horse's head has yielded to where you want it to be, to **breathe into his nose** with your nose for reward. Most horses absolutely love this! And if they've never had it done to them before by a human, they can completely melt in your arms in utter bonding delight.



Here Doc has yielded his head softly with no amount of pressure, so that he can receive the nose-to-nose breathe, which horses enjoy so much. **It creates an intimate bond and builds a foundation of trust.**

Here, Doc finally gets it. Bigtime! I have no real amount of pressure going on here whatsoever, **just a simple touch and he brings his head over.** And why not? He's going to get rubbed on and rewarded for it and he can't wait!



Teaching The Horse To Be Driven From Behind



Teach the horse to be driven from the rear by sending him off and directing his head away from you while twirling the end of the rope at or near his hind end. Release the pressure (stop the twirling/"asking") the second the horse complies/moves. If you keep asking (if you keep twirling), he will only get confused. Too many horses can't understand being driven from the rear because people forget to stop "asking" when

the horse complies. **(Remember: they learn what you want from the release, not the pressure)**. Release when you get what you want, even if that means baby step "tries" on the horse's part in the beginning. **It's very important for a horse to understand how to be driven from the rear**, as this will later help you in trailer loading, sending the horse into a stall, through a gate, etc.; the uses are endless and therefore, a highly valuable, even crucial, skill for the horse to master, and you, too!

As the horse circles you, **let the horse move, not you**. Practice remaining in one spot, turning to remain facing the horse at all times (because **facing the horse directly is a pressure** in itself, and is natural body language they are born understanding), but don't exit your staked-out spot. This teaches the horse that you're the driver here in this exercise!





If the horse comes in too close to you, simply block his eye with the hand holding the end of the rope closest to his face, as I'm doing here; the horse will automatically move away from you. This is handy to know whenever you want to move a horse out of your space! Raise your hand up and extend it to block their eye (like you're pushing the eye away invisibly). The head automatically

moves away, and **where the head and eye goes, so does the body**. In this picture: my left arm is the driving arm to move Doc forward; the right arm is the "move farther away" tool. Tip: Next time you're trying to take your horse out of pasture and any nearby horses try to escape past you through the open gate, try this same technique. Stare at them (as a predator would stare them down), as this glare is pressure itself, and block their eye with your hand (like you're "patting" the air towards their eye) and watch how quickly they turn their heads and move off. If they don't move off at first, simply exaggerate the movement more aggressively toward their eye while walking into them, (no need to touch them!) and, believe me, they'll move away and off and out of your space quite respectfully. This is similar to how a lead mare moves the herd, so they well understand that body language!

Note that: **You don't always need a roundpen or arena to work your horse**, teaching him; a pasture will do! **Working around other horses in his herd often helps the horse to feel "safe,"** especially young horses like Doc. He's fully aware that the other horses around him here are relaxed and grazing, telling him this person is "no big deal; it's okay to relax and go with the flow." I often start young horses with other horses nearby; it helps them to relax more and feel safer and positions yourself as a "leader" in his herd.



Teaching Water Crossing

Before introducing water crossing to your horse, have him cross tarps first. Drive him from the rear; don't lead him. Learning to deal with crossing tarps makes water-crossing lessons far easier. Start with the tarp small, folded up, and as the horse handles that, start slowly unfolding the tarp, increasing the size gradually, sending the horse across it, driving from the rear. Back up if you have to, making the tarp smaller again if the horse reaches a toleration threshold. And always go back to bonding to reassure the horse when and where needed before beginning again.



After you have worked with the horse crossing tarp, he's ready to be introduced to water crossing. I'd only had Doc about a week here, and the previous owner had told me that Doc had never had any experience with water crossing whatsoever. And seeing his fears of even puddles told me: she was right. The reason horses initially can be afraid to cross even puddles is simple: **because their eyes are on the sides of their heads, they have no true depth perception as we do.** So, always remember that a horse sees out of left and right eye separately, taking in visual impulses from either side. We humans see directly forward with much ease because our eyes are located on the front of our head (binocular vision), allowing for greater depth perception. **To read more about horse vision, which will help you tremendously in understanding horses and their**

perceptions of water crossing [CLICK HERE](#). Therefore, for all a horse knows, a simple puddle could be as deep as their body is! Or deeper! Scary thought! (Think like a horse to understand their fears and to help nurture them through them.) Here, I'm introducing Doc to a natural spring that exists in his present, new-to-him-then pasture. He needed to get used to this spring because it is one of his sources for drinking water there. Before this, all he'd known were water troughs. Lower your stature as you approach the water for a horse's first time. This tells him initially that it's no big deal.

Pet on the horse while you introduce him to the water. If you can, encourage him to drink.

Ahhh . . . it's just water! I'm squatting. I'm relaxed. Drink, it's good!





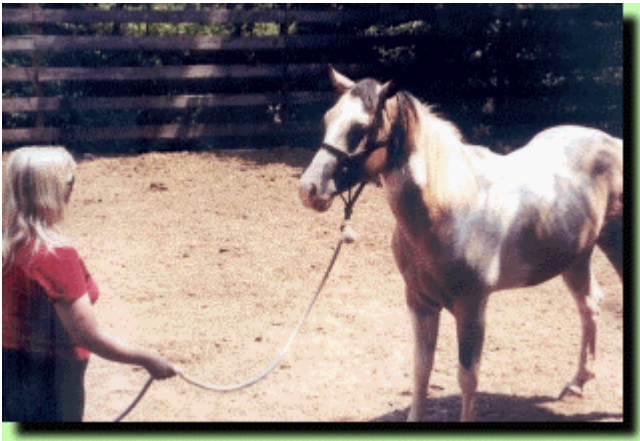
Allow the horse to see your hand on the "off side"; this helps desensitize them to seeing you on both sides of their bodies (translating later to when you are in the saddle). I do this exercise with young horses as frequently as I can.

Begin to drive the horse from the rear, near to or just on the edge of the water. Only one hoof in for the first few rounds is just fine, in fact: recommended. Baby steps. Slowly encourage the circle to become wider, more feet in, but don't force. Go with the horse's toleration rhythm. Let it happen naturally and perceive the horse's threshold *before* he does, dropping back a step at those times, and move within that rhythm. I.E., if the horse hits a threshold and begins to get frightened, simply back up and retreat a step, one toe in only again, or none at all if necessary. If you have to, if the horse is truly frightened, stop, take a break, give him time to digest the lesson, and bond on him to get him to relax again. **Always return to the bonding step in training whenever you need to, to help the horse feel nurtured through any fears.** And be patient. Horses are flight animals and it is natural and normal for them to retreat when afraid. Bonding helps to bring them back to more rational and relaxed ways of thinking again.



If all is going well, drive him farther and farther in his circles into the water and back out again, and he'll quickly see it's no big deal as Doc did here! Now he loves his pasture's natural spring.

Miscellaneous Other Training-Doc-In-the-Basics Photos



Here I'm teaching Doc to back up softly on cue. **All horses should be taught to back up on the ground and it's an excellent lesson that teaches them to pay attention to slack in the rope**, which will later translate, in the saddle, to understanding reins better.

Remember to do your groundwork yielding exercises again after saddling up and before riding!

This softens the horse and gets his mind and body in a more compliant, and safer-to-you spot before you take off on a ride.



A soft, yielding neck on the ground translates to a softer rein-yield in the saddle, so do your groundwork always!

After mounting, do neck yields to both sides before ever moving off. **The horse should stand still until you ask him to go.** All of the above exercises (and many more I teach!) will help to keep you the safest you've ever been on a horse, and your horse becoming a willing and happy partner, content to let you be the leader.



Always end a day's lesson in a good spot! **Horses tend to remember *most* what happened *last* in a lesson, for your next time around, so be sure to end on a positive at all times.** Young Doc is a delight to work with! I'm greatly enjoying teaching him all the things a horse needs to know, letting him learn the gentle, Natural Horsemanship way!



Final Note: Two of the best training tools you can have at your disposal are:

1. **Your hands:** Never underestimate the power of a loving, nurturing touch. Train with love at all times.
2. **A good natural horsemanship halter**

The Natural Horsemanship halter shown here on Doc in all of these pictures is crucial for these exercises. This halter is my favorite NH halter out there, and I highly recommend it. To purchase this particular halter from our on-line store, visit our online products store.

These training pictures represent only a handful of hundreds of Natural Horsemanship training techniques I have gathered over the years from studying all the greatest leaders in NH.

We can all learn from each other!

If you'd like to learn more about Natural Horsemanship, learn riding, or have me work on your horse with a problem you're having, contact me at:

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