Equine Safety & Riding 101
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**History:**

- Equines (Horses) were one of the earliest domesticated animals (domesticated around 4000 BC), and were used for transportation and war. Equines were also a common tool for agricultural development.
  (http://www.equineheritageinstitute.org/horses-in-history/)

- Men have always rode astride (one leg on each side of the equine). This was for optimum control of the animal, which was needed especially in battle.

- Women have been seen riding astride in illustrations of the middle ages, but it was not encouraged; It was more proper for the woman to sit behind a male rider with her legs together, or aside the horse. In the Late Middle Ages, saddles for riding aside were developed into a platform or chair-shaped box for a woman to sit in - this box necessitated a handler, as there was no real control between the rider and horse in this saddle. In the Late 1500s-1600s, a side saddle of sorts was used - the side-saddles used today are largely a Victorian invention.
  (https://www.janeausten.co.uk/the-history-of-side-saddles/)
  (https://truewestmagazine.com/the-scandalous-saddle/)
  (http://ilaria.veltri.tripod.com/sidesaddle.html - Ilaria Veltri degli Ansari is the author of this article)

- Equines were not really classified by breeds, they were mostly classified by what they could accomplish. Lady Isabel's 'History of the Horse' class reviews this topic in more detail.

- Equines eligible to participate in SCA activities include: Horses, donkeys, mules, asses, and zorses (zebra hybrids). Each animal excels at different tasks - you will likely see horses participate the most in equine activities in the SCA.

- If you go to an event, and believe you will be interacting with equines (even if you are not actively participating in equine activities) Make sure you sign an Equine Insurance Waiver - this reassures the SCA that you know the risks of being around equines.

With this class, you will understand the risks more fully, and be even more prepared to have a positive and safe experience in your SCA equine community.

**Equine Psychology:**

Equines communicate mostly with their 1) Ears 2) Head position

Other ways of communication include: Tail, eyes, hooves

How to tell if the equine is relaxed: (picture 1)

Ears are slightly droopy and/or swiveling slowly. Head is low and/or not straining upward.
Relaxed animals = Relaxed posture

How to tell if the equine is attentive or nervous: (picture 2)

Ears are facing the direction of interest (eyes and head can also be included in this).
Head carriage is raised upward. These signs indicate the equine is assessing whether it is in danger or not.
Muscles will also be tense; the equine is getting ready to act in response to nature.

How to tell if the horse is aggressive: (picture 3)

Ears are rotated away from the head, and are flat against the skull. Eyes can be wide, with whiteness showing (this does not happen naturally in equines, but Arabian horses can be seen doing this more so than other equines).
Teeth can be showing in an aggressive manner, and the equine may bite.

**SAFETY:**

**Rule #1:** ALWAYS ASK PERMISSION from the owner.
NEVER approach an equine without asking first. Here are the reasons why:

a) The Owner: They dictate care and health of the equine. They may be too busy to supervise, or they may just not want visitors. Be respectful if they tell you no.

b) The Equine: The equine may not be friendly; the equine may be eating, the equine may be resting. The equines at events are working animals, more so than pets. They have jobs, and they need to rest. Respect their rest time if the owner enforces it.

c) You: The owner may not know who you are. The owners would assume responsibility if an accident occurs to you during the encounter. Please respect their decision to say no.

**Rule #2:** ALWAYS be visible to the equine.
Equines have a wide range of vision, but there are two blind spots:

1) **Directly in front of the Face** and 2) **Directly behind the equine.**

If you approach them without letting them see you, this is dangerous! It may result in you or the equine getting injured.

Here is the correct way to navigate around equines (as approved by the Equine Specialists at Utah State University):
The rules which complement this: 1) NEVER sneak up on an equine from behind
2) NEVER go under the equine (under the head or under the belly)

**Rule #3:** NEVER FEED an equine without permission from the owner.
Here’s why:

The owner might have already fed the equine, the equine may have allergies, but mostly:
The owner is in charge. Be prepared to respect the owner if they say no.

If you are allowed to, here’s how to do it: Keep the food in your open palm. A closed palm around food could result in your hand or fingers getting bitten. (If their teeth can bite through a carrot, they can bite through your fingers.

**Rule #4:** Before riding an equine, get to know them on the ground.
Here’s why:

You can get rid of nerves by getting to know the equine before you ride. Relaxed, confident riders have a better experience than nervous ones. On the ground, there’s less chance of the rider getting hurt. Take things slowly to be safe. Get to know their personality - not all equines are the same temperament.

**Rule #5:** NEVER leave children alone with an equine.
ESPECIALLY if they are: Under 5 years old and/or struggle to listen to directions

This is a hospital trip waiting to happen - “Children under 5” should always be with their parents, but if you must leave them, keep them in your campsite away from the equines with another adult to supervise.

REMEMBER: Equines are a child magnet, and equine owners are not responsible for your offspring. ALWAYS keep your attention on your child when around equines.

**Rule #6:** NEVER bring your dog to equine activities.
Even if your ‘Fluffy’ doesn’t even look at other people or animals, this does not mean the equine will know that.

Equines are prey animals - Dogs are predator animals. These two will not mix in new company.
If you plan to visit the equine site, leave your dog with someone who will watch it. Dogs need as much supervision as a 3 year old, because that is the level of their intelligence.

**Rule #7:** Be Courteous to the equine.
Use the Golden rule - would I like to be treated this way?

Equines have feelings, and they get tired. Be courteous.
Riding:

These rules are meant for those who have never ridden an equine before - if you have ridden before, these are good guidelines on how to make riding more enjoyable.

Rule #1: Again, obtain permission first.
Most owners will let you brush, feed, or even tack up (put riding gear on) the equine. Riding however, is a different story.

Owners may say:
a) Their equine needs to rest. Equines are working animals, not necessarily pets. If the owner says they’re tired, allow the equine its rest. Ask politely when a good time to ride would be, if right then is not an option.
b) Their equine is too advanced for beginning riders. The owner may know of another equine that may be more suitable for your skill level.

Owners may not give reasons for refusal. Please be respectful if they refuse entirely.

* Most owners will split travel and feed costs to willing participants. This will get you a better chance to ride!

Rule #2: LISTEN to the Owner.
They know the equine better than you do. Even if you’ve ridden before, there are MULTIPLE ways to ride equines, and they are not all the same.

Please ask the owner if there is anything you need to know about the equine before you ride - some answers to this questions can be: “He needs a good kick to get him going” or “Be gentle with the reigns” or “He needs special attention when passing the gate”.
If these come up, ask the owners what you should do to accommodate for that.

This is especially true with the tack: (see pictures 4 & 5)

Not all tack is the same - some bridles have special bits or even none at all. Make sure you know about how sensitive the horse is to its tack (especially the bit).

Ask if they have a helmet! Some people will not let you on a horse without one.

SCA Rules:
“Per Society Rules, minors must be 5 years or older in order to Authorize in Equestrian. For equine interactions and activities that do not require an authorization, the Society does not prohibit children under 5 years of age… Marshals always retain the right to stop any activity that endangers others or the SCA…”

[http://www.sca.org/officers/equestrian/policy.html#int](http://www.sca.org/officers/equestrian/policy.html#int)
Rule #3: Wear durable clothing!
Riding equines gets dirty, sweaty & exhausting. You should feel comfortable under saddle.

What You Should Wear:
1. Shirt: Breathable, and one you wouldn’t mind getting dirty
   It is recommended to wear a long sleeve shirt, to keep dust and sweat off your skin.

2. Pants: (same as above); No shorts, because the saddle will pinch your bare skin.
   It is recommended to wear thicker pants to keep your skin from being pinched.

3. Dress: (same as above); Breathable and able to bend around the saddle.
   It is not recommended to wear a dress for beginning riders or your first ride with a new equine.
   Some equines may not be used to fabric swirling behind their head, and may spook as a result.

   For more advanced riders and equines, it is recommended to make a dress which will straddle an equine easily under the rider and across the rump, without bunching up.
   Even while wearing a dress, PLEASE wear thick pants underneath!

   If you don’t want a broken toe, don’t wear sandals or tennis shoes. Also, more sturdy shoes with a heel will help you keep your feet in the stirrups.

Rule #4: Start out slow.
No one was “born to ride” - it’s ok if you need extra time to get acquainted with riding, simply let people know.

Tacking Up a Horse:

You have been given permission to tack up the horse - now what?
The steps involved in tacking up are the following:

First: Halter the horse and lead it to the designated grooming area.
Second: Secure the animal to the grooming post/pole
Third: Brush the dirt off the body, and comb the mane and tail.
Fourth: Pick out the mud/dirt/rocks from the horse's feet.
Fifth: Place a saddle pad onto the horse's back.
Sixth: Place the saddle on.
Seventh: Replace the halter with the bridle.

There are several different kinds of saddles and bridles - there are some pictures of commonly used tack at the back of this lesson. Refer to the owner for instructions on how to apply the tack.

**Reference Videos for Tying a Horse:** https://youtu.be/ks-c4aktxE0
This is the safest option for tying a horse, according to Utah State University.
A second variation has been found that could be simpler to use: https://youtu.be/fG6LiX10hlU
Riding Basics:

1. **Begin with riding astride.**
   If it’s your first time, **DO NOT** ride side saddle. Here’s why:

   You will have **better control of the equine** if you are astride; should something go wrong, you will be in a better position to dismount from the equine if you need to.

   Start with riding astride. Once you get comfortable with that, **THEN** you can move on to side saddle (if there are any available).

   You may need someone to hold the equine while you mount. When you mount, you start on the equine’s **left side**, by placing your **left foot** into the stirrup. Swing your **right leg** over.

2. **RELAX! :D**
   The equines you are riding are accustomed to people riding them. The owners will NEVER put a new rider on a challenging equine.

   Equines can also ‘smell fear’; nervous person = nervous equine.

   Relax and get to know the equine before you get on; before you start moving, relax in the saddle - it’s ok to ask someone to hold the equine while you do this.

3. **Start out by walking.** This is why:

   You can easily gaged how much the equine will challenge your authority this way. Some equines, once they get going, will be hard to slow down; make sure the equine understands your cues before you get going faster.

   Not everyone uses the same cues - some people use words only, some people use a word and a kick of the feet to engage speed. For directions, some people use the reigns; other people use their feet. Be sure to ask the owner how to give directions to the horse.

4. **Make sure the horse understands your commands, both Verbal and Physical.**

   **Verbal:**
   “Walk”, “Trot”, “Canter” and “Hoe/Whoa” (Stop) are all standard. If you are new, I do not recommend going faster than a canter. Have someone watch if you do want to gallop.

   **Physical:**
   Pull back the reign with your left hand to go left, pull back the reign with your right hand to go right. **Your opposite hand should be loose**, so the horse can move it’s head in the direction you want it to go.

   With leg cues, there are **atleast two different ways** to apply leg pressure (not just a kick); along with, or instead of reign signals, you can do either at the direction of the horse owner:
   a) Apply pressure with your left foot towards the **buttocks side** of the equine to go left, and the right foot for the equine to go right.
   b) Apply pressure towards the **shoulder side** of the equine with your **left knee** for the horse to go right, and the **right knee** for the horse to go left.
**Your opposite leg should be loose to allow the horse to move.**

Pull back with gentle force (not too much) to stop or slow down. Loosen the reigns and give leg pressure to get going.

Remember the Golden Rule! Be patient, and listen to the owner or ask for help if the horse is not doing what you are asking. We want to make sure you and the equine will be safe.

5. **Increasing Speed:** The faster your equine goes, the smoother the ride - PLEASE ASK FIRST THOUGH!
   This is why:

   a) The equine may need to rest from an event, or the equine is getting ready for an event. We don’t want to exhaust the equine athlete.

   b) Safety first. Do what you are comfortable with, not what others are telling you, or even what the equine is trying to tell you.

**Closing thoughts:**

Practice getting off the Equine. Why? **SAFETY FIRST!**

**Accidents can happen: don’t assume nothing will happen!**
As with any sporting activity, accidents happen. Throw in a 1200 pound animal in the mix, and some crazy stuff can happen. Knowing how to get off, and accommodating for your garb can save you from life-threatening injury.

**Also** remember: Riding an equine is not a passive activity. You will engage your legs, arms and core in the experience. A wimpy core could result in you falling off the equine unintentionally. Keep your balance and your position by having a strong core.
Other Sources for Safety:

https://equusmagazine.com/behavior/horse-body-language - more in-depth psychology of the equine.
http://donwenna.homestead.com/SafetyTips_Rentals.html - explains leg cue (b) more fully.

Picture 1
Relaxed

Picture 2
Alert

Picture 3
Aggressive (Grey horse)

Picture 4
Saddles

Parts of the English Bridle

Parts of the Western Bridle