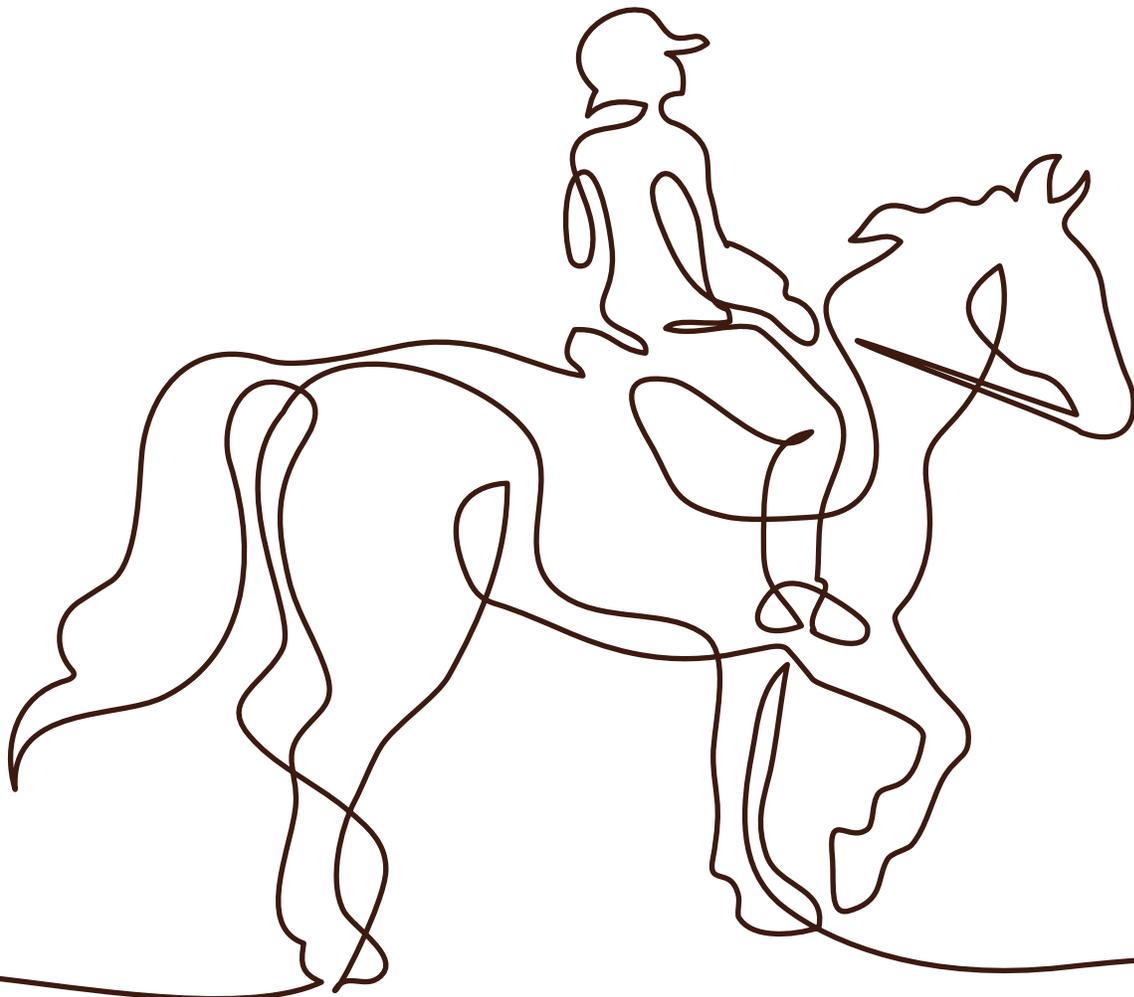




Detective Mindset in the Saddle

“Just the Facts, Ma’am”



Detective Mindset in the Saddle

Maybe you and your horse keep hitting a plateau together. Something doesn't quite feel right between you two (but you aren't sure what). Your horse doesn't seem ready for a show or offsite horse event (and maybe you don't either).

You're confused about what to do next. The good news is that it's actually pretty simple. All you need to do is go back to basics, look for clues and see hidden patterns. That's what will help you find the heart of the problem (or mystery) – and guide you to the solution.

Ready to start? Pick a time to do a specific riding session with the exercises below. Read over all the study guide questions before you ride your horse. That way, you'll know what to look for during the session under saddle.

When you answer the questions, keep thinking “just the facts, ma'am (or sir).” This means to keep your emotions to the side so you can “see” the data. Don't judge your responses – please just literally answer the questions. For example, if you write down “I'm the worst rider ever” to a question – hey, that's never the right answer, please try again.

I. BEFORE THE RIDE

When I ride my horse, he sometimes:

- Ignores my aids
 - Seems confused about what to do
 - Heads for arena gate on his own
 - Acts sluggish or outright balks
 - Acts spooky (shies, chews the bit nervously, keeps his head up)
 - Hops a little when I ask for certain movements
 - Goes faster than I asked
 - Has focus issues (squirrel!)
 - Does something else that isn't on this list (describe here)
- Do your yeses have to do with spookier or faster behavior? Or are they in the duller, balkier behavior category? Or the confused, distracted “squirrel” zone?
 - Does your horse immediately display the above behavior once you start riding him? Or does he start out well, but then gradually displays more of the behavior as the ride goes on? If so, is the behavior more likely to be worse in the beginning, middle or end of the ride?

II. DURING THE RIDE

- How is your horse during the mounting process? Does he stand quietly or does he move around before you get on him? Once you mount, does he wait for you to ask him to walk off? Or does he just start walking once you hit the saddle (ready or not)?
- Walk your horse around the arena (or wherever you are riding him). Just ask him in the usual way that you do. What is his response? Slow walk, medium walk, fast walk, no walk?
- Using the whole arena (or riding area), now ask him to change his speed at the walk for several strides at a time. Ask for a slow walk, then a medium walk, then a fast walk. Then maybe back to a medium, followed by the fast again. Then down to the slow walk. Keep repeating this for about 5-10 minutes.
- Is it harder to maintain certain speeds consistently? Does he tend to slow down or speed up? Does he have a preferred speed for the walk?
- What are your primary aids to ask him for the different speeds? Leg? Voice commands? Seat? Reins? Telepathy?
- Can you do the exercise (at all speeds) with a loose rein?

- Are either of you sweating or becoming winded during the exercise? Is anyone becoming emotional (you, your horse, the spectators)?
- Every now and then, ask him to stop and then resume walking. How much aid do you need to get a stop? Your seat? Seat and reins? Seat, reins, legs and aiming at the arena rail?
- While you're walking around, how is steering going for you and your horse? Is it present most of the time – or is it a random phenomenon? Does he steer more easily to one side than the other?
- Most horses have a side that is stiff (where the inside bend feels like granite). How is your horse's left side? His right side? If you're not sure, walk some circles in each direction. Note what's different about how he goes in each direction (and how much work you have to do to keep him on the circle). Write down what you notice (this is actually one of the more important questions, so we'll give you more room to write):

- End the warm up with a trot. When you ask for the trot, are your reins looser or tighter? Can you easily ask your horse to trot slowly – and then calmly extend the trot? Or does it all seem a bit up to fate and the arena gods as to what your horse will do when you ask for a trot?
- After these warm-up exercises, go ahead and do your normal ride. Pay extra attention to your horse's movement and mood. Do you notice anything new or see his behavior from a different perspective?



III. AFTER THE RIDE

How do you respond when your horse displays behavior you don't like?

- Are you annoyed (stop it)
- Curious (what's this about, anyway)
- Nervous (oh no, not again)
- Embarrassed (no one else's horse does this)
- Pessimistic (this is never going to stop)
- Crushed (I suck and my horse hates me)?
- Or something else (describe here: _____)

When the behavior starts, what do you do?

- Ignore it and hope it goes away
- Try to redirect his mind by asking for different maneuvers
- Ask him to go faster
- Stop him and start over
- Verbally shame him (this rarely works, by the way)
- Add more leg (that's always what your instructor wants anyway)
- Tense up, curl into ball and wait for the ride to end
- Mentally check out and think about horses you might want to buy

How do you end the ride with your horse?

- As soon as possible
- When he has obeyed at least two of my aids or in three hours, whichever comes first
- When I'm reasonably sure he will stand still while I dismount
- When he seems relaxed and happy after a good ride together
- After he has improved in some key area, especially if it's hard for him
- When my instructor releases me from the lesson

What's your horse's mood like after the ride is over?

- Relieved
- Tense
- Hungry
- Excited
- Calm and peaceful
- Bored

D. DETECTIVE MIND ASSESSMENT

Go back read over your answers. Put on your detective mind hat (literally or metaphorically). Try to see where the patterns are. The unemotional, factual ones (rather than “I suck and my horse hates me”). A pattern list might look something like this:

- My horse tends to be fine at the slower walk
- But then gets spooky when we extend the walk
- I notice this is worse when going to the right
- I usually tighten my reins in case he gets nervous
- Sometimes I stop him and say “quit”
- It takes seat and rein to stop him.
- He tosses his head toward the end of the ride
- I end the ride when I feel like he is receptive to my aids
- He is eager to go to his paddock/stall after the ride.
- I’m sometimes frustrated after the ride

Review your pattern list and see if it gives you clues about what’s going on with your horse. For example, the horse in the above list might need to do a few specific warm up exercises to loosen his hindquarters and right side before doing trot work. Or the rider might want to experiment with rein contact and seat exercises.

But the biggest benefit to the list is that you are now more aware of what your horse specifically does and how you respond to it. Calm, factual awareness helps you gain more perspective on the situation. This can become a catalyst for creative solutions and progress in the right direction.

Did something come up with your horse that confused or troubled you? If you would like to discuss your results, I’m offering a **free 30-minute consultation** call to anyone who has completed the study guide exercises. Please reach out to Lynn at horsewisecoach.com/contact to schedule.

