

Ronan Horsemanship.

GROUNDWORK

Full Circle



Fundamental groundwork exercises are designed to teach the basic social rules to our horses: don't bite, don't buck, don't hit, don't push! Foundation groundwork exercises are designed to teach good manners: how to behave in our human society, how to be refined, light and soft.

The Full Circle exercise is where real groundwork starts. This exercise should be combined to the Half Circle exercise as soon as you can master them both, but I followed Buck Brannaman's presentation in two separate exercises as it is easier for us - Humans - to learn separately. The goal of this exercise is to bring the method we approached when lunging our horse to an upper level, hence a few redundancies. That will help the horse _ and the horseman _ to improve coordination and softness.

CAUTION!!!
Do not perform that exercise with a colt or with a very disrespectful horse. Moving the front end implies that the horse will turn right in front of you: if not educated to leave your personal space, he may push you or run over you to switch direction. In any case, always keep your flag in hand during the first sessions: be ready to tap your horse firmly in the belly to push him away from you if necessary.

Position
Stand right in front of the horse, about one meter far from his head. Hold the rope in the left hand to send the horse to the left, and vice-versa. Keep your flag in the other hand. Once the horse is moving around you, position yourself on a parallel line to his shoulder. The flag should remain neutral unless you need it to put pressure.

Security
First, keep the horse straight in front of you. Once he moves around you, keep his head tipped slightly inside ALL the time, so the hindquarters are always forced to the outside. If you think the hindend is getting too close to you, just pull on the rope to draw the head, that will push the hindquarters away. Keep in mind that you should look at the whole horse's body all the time.

Process
As for the lunging exercise, raise your left hand sideways and point the direction to the horse. Remember not to pull on the rope, you should operate through a feeling. At this level of work, your horse will respond immediately and walk nicely around you. If not, just go back to lunging a little more before you start to practice the Foundation exercises.

The horse's body should be slightly bent from head to tail: the head is tipped inside, the shoulder kept outside, flank bending along the circle and hindend lightly curved inside. Let the horse walk gently two or three circles, then prepare to change direction. As mentioned in the lunging exercise, the idea is to untrack his hindquarters: turn to face the hip and move toward this direction, draw slightly your horse's head and let him some time to process the cue and cross his hind legs without moving forward. During the first sessions, you still may have to use the flag to push the hindquarters away, but pretty soon moving to the hip will be enough.

Once you are satisfied by the result, it is time to change direction, without stopping! That is the part where YOU have to improve your coordination: you have to switch hand during the untracking phase, lead rope going from the left to the right hand and flag from the right to the left hand. As you keep walking toward his hip, put the flag in a neutral position and raise your right hand to point the other direction until the horse shifts his weight on his hindend and moves the frontend through. Here it is, you're now walking on a circle in the other direction.

Repeat the process until these circles and changes of directions become a smooth dance between you and your horse. It might take a little time, but it is definitely worth it.



Q&A
What if my horse keeps looking to the outside?
They will all do that at the beginning. Your consistency will fix that: every time your horse looks outside, bump on the rope. Not hard, but firm enough to make sure you are understood. A few minutes later, it will look outside again, well bump a little more. After a few sessions, it will not be necessary anymore.

What if my horse does not bend correctly?
That's where you still need the flag. Tap gently the shoulder until the horse bends correctly. It might start to trot then, let it go and keep moving in circles until it walks AND bend correctly, that will be the moment to release pressure: untrack the hindquarters, stop and rub!

More Q&A online...