

# Secrets To A Cooperative, Eager Horse

## Behavioral Strategies For The Modern Equestrian



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### Basic Terminology and Concepts

The purpose of this document is to familiarize you with some of the terminology that may be used during the webinar, and give some context for behavioral techniques available compared to those typically used in the horse world.

The actual presentation will be more practical than technical, and there will not be a test at the end, so don't worry if this information makes your brain hurt. 😎

### Behavioral Strategies For The Modern Equestrian:

Traditional training of ridden horses uses primarily **Pressure/Release**. You add some pressure, and when the horse does what you want, you release the pressure. This is also referred to as *Negative Reinforcement* (explained below). This is not the only technique available to create behaviors.

This webinar will discuss more ways create the outcomes you want, and more ways to encourage and motivate your horse to offer them.

### First, Some Basics:

#### **The Basic Principle of Behavioral Psychology**

B.F. Skinner first wrote about this in 1938:

*Behavior is determined by its immediate consequences.*

The formula is commonly described as the “*ABC’s of Animal Training*”

**A** = **A**ntecedent, what comes before the behavior. Commonly a cue, command or other signal that initiates the behavior

**B** = **B**ehavior, what happens after the cue. What your horse does.

**C** = **C**onsequence, what happens immediately following the Behavior.

When training it is important to be aware of the ABCs. What you choose for the **A**ntecedent and what happens as the **C**onsequence will effect the **B**ehavior!

## **A Couple Of Important Definitions:**

### **Reinforcement:**

Reinforcement means you are encouraging the behavior. You know you have successfully reinforced the behavior you are looking for when there is an improvement in the behavior next time.

**There are two types of Reinforcement, ‘Positive’ and ‘Negative’**

### **Negative Reinforcement (R-):**

*Negative Reinforcement (R-)* is not as bad as it sounds. There’s no implied value in the word, it’s just used to indicate that we take something away. In this case, Negative just means we SUBTRACT (take away) something after the horse does the behavior we want, e.g. we take away leg pressure when he moves. We will have successfully reinforced the behavior if the horse moves with lighter pressure next time.

R- is most effective when the pressure is applied tactfully, and the release is well-timed. Often you’ll hear “*It’s not the pressure, but the release that teaches*”.

## **Positive Reinforcement (R+):**

*Positive Reinforcement (R+)*, in contrast to R-, means we ADD something after the horse does the behavior we want. What we add is something she likes, e.g.: We give a well-timed treat when our horse stands at the mounting block. We will have successfully reinforced the behavior if the horse stands more quietly next time.

Every individual has different preferences for what will work as a reinforcer or reward. For example, I like chocolate croissants, but not cheesecake, so even though you may think of those both as 'treats', cheesecake will not work as a reinforcer for me, but a chocolate croissant will! (*important information about me that might come in handy one day*).



## **One More Term:**

### **The Bridge:**

As a way to vastly improve the timing of R+, trainers have developed the use of a signal to mark exactly when the desired behavior occurs. When trained properly, the horse understands that the signal = success.

The Bridge is usually a short, crisp sound that is easily trained by pairing it with a treat. Then, when your horse puts extra effort into a jump, for example, you don't have to rush to get the cookie into her mouth - you just offer the Bridge signal at the precise moment and the horse will understand that a treat is coming for that effort. The horse knows exactly what she did to earn the reinforcement (jumped higher) because of the improved timing.

## **Enjoy More Possibilities For Success.**

Clever modern equestrians will enjoy the benefits of expanding their techniques beyond the traditional horse training methods. By understanding the nuances of how to use Pressure/Release as well as Positive Reinforcement you can make it easier to have a cooperative and eager horse.