



## Flat Work Tips

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1. Look for connection with your hands, NOT shape. The correct shape in the horse's body and neck is a consequence of good connection and not the other way around. In other words, if you have the right feeling in your hands, and use your seat and leg effectively to do things like transitions and move forward in harmony, then the shape of the horse will naturally become rounder and more "through." In practice try to tell yourself to avoid pulling in an effort to make your horse round. Instead keep a short rein and focus on the feeling that you have of the horse's mouth with the bit. Then send the horse forward into this feeling you have in your hands, and don't make it complicated. If you ride forward in a consistent and pleasant rhythm with a good feel, the horse will start to relax into the aids on his/her own.
2. Many riders have trouble knowing how much pressure to carry against the horse's mouth. This leads to a situation where they tend to carry far too little contact, giving the horse nothing to accept. As a result, when they do need contact for something, a transition or a certain level of flexion, the relationship with the mouth has not been adequately established and the horse pulls against the uncomfortable change. The best way to sort out how much pressure on the bit is appropriate is to ask a good professional to physically show you. The professional can hold your hand while you are holding the bit and replicate the correct pressure.
3. Don't Ignore the walk ! It is an extremely common and unfortunate practice for riders to neglect the walk. The conversation you are having with the horse begins at the walk. If you wander around aimlessly at the walk and then expect the ride to (really start) when you get going in the trot and canter you are doomed. The horse should be asked to march forward actively in the walk. You should seek to establish a feel, a consistent connection with the horse's mouth at the walk while you are asking him/her to march forward. At the same time you don't want to harass your horse and pester them with a constant barrage of aids. Keep it simple and uncomplicated. Resist the urge to demand that your horse be perfect as soon as you get on. This is a very easy way to get into a completely unnecessary fight. The key is to have a clear sense of what you want. **Move forward into feel, with compassion!**