

Terms To Remember

By John Moore

Primary, Secondary & Tertiary Cues – Primary Cue is the first signal you give a horse to cause it to do something. A primary cue is non-forceful and will take on meaning if you go to the Secondary Cue, which actually, physically causes the horse to understand the Primary Cue. If you get no response to the Secondary Cue, move on to the Tertiary Cue.

Escalating levels of Pressure – Moving from Primary to Secondary to Tertiary represents an escalation of pressure. It's important that you begin with Primary, and if there's no response you maintain Primary and add Secondary. The moment you get a correct response you release both. If there's no response to Secondary you add Tertiary while maintaining Primary and Secondary. The moment there's a correct response you release all three.

Release – Horses don't respond well to punitive pressure; they respond much better to discovering a release when they yield to pressure. Horses seek comfort. If there is never a release (comfort) or the release comes inconsistently you create an unresponsive horse, i.e. stiff neck, hard mouth, dead sided, etc. Example: Constant rein pressure mistakenly identified as "contact" leads to open mouths, high heads, pushing through the bit and a disconnect between horse and rider.

Yielding To Pressure – When the horse yields to pressure and moves away from it we call it "yielding to pressure". To teach this there must be a properly timed release of that pressure the instant the horse starts moving away from the pressure. When the horse begins to realize that there is a release coming it relaxes and begins to move toward the release rather than simply moving away from the pressure.

Moving Toward a Release – This is when the horse has learned that when it yields to pressure it is actually moving toward a release. When this understanding has been reached, the horse relaxes and is no longer escaping pressure, but rather moving toward something good. This helps avoid the "hot" or panicky horse that performs its maneuvers but stays excited throughout. It also helps the sluggish horse who has been lazily moving away from pressure – when they find out they're going someplace nice they tend to move with more impulsion.

Opposition Reflex - It is the natural instinct of a horse to go against pressure it instinctively believes it cannot escape. This is called Opposition Reflex and is manifested, for example, in high headed horses who are sticking their noses skyward as they brace against pressure from a heavy handed rider who is not giving release to the horse when the horse responds correctly to rein pressure. This applies to all forms of pressure, and there must be something to entice the horse to yield to pressure rather than following its Opposition Reflex instinct and bracing against it – and that "something" is a properly timed release the moment the horse yields to the pressure.

Soak Time – After you have gotten a horse's attention and have taught it something, you should always take a break and allow the horse to "soak" on what it has just learned (At this point you will often see the horse lick its lips and chew). This could be for a brief period in the middle of a training session, or at the end of the session. This is why you always want to quit a training session on a positive note to be sure the horse soaks overnight on what you want it to be soaking on. If you quit after a fight or adversarial training session the horse will soak on the negative attitude it had during the session, and in the morning will probably not be too happy to see you, and it will probably not have retained much of what it learned the day before. Conversely, if you quit when things are going well the horse will soak on a good attitude and what was learned during the training session.

Loose rein – When its time to take a break, loosen the reins, completely! The reason many horses won't stand still when the reins are released is because they have been constantly held in, which triggers opposition reflex and causes them to be pushing into the bit while they stand - then when the reins are released they walk away. Rein pressure should mean something or it shouldn't be there. Constant pulling is not "contact". When teaching a new concept to a horse involving rein pressure, give a release of the reins when the horse gives you the desired response. Constant pulling on the reins confuses a horse and

ultimately teaches them to ignore you. If releasing the reins of your standing horse means it will walk away, then there are effective methods of solving this problem – but they do not include holding them in with two reins.

Soft Feel – It should take only a few ounces of pressure to cue a horse. The pressure necessary, for example, to put a horse's head into the proper position should be measured in ounces, not pounds. When this is the case, we say the horse has a soft feel, and responds to light pressure. The rider needs to develop a soft feel as well. A horse with a soft feel responds to pressure by immediately yielding and not escaping or bracing against the pressure. A horse with a soft feel will drop its head and yield its nose inward as soon as you pick up the reins, and will collect itself or move off with just a weight shift or slight squeeze of the rider's legs. A good indicator of how well your colt starting and training program is going.

Lateral Flexion – "Lateral" means sideways, and "Flexion" means to bend. In this case we are referring to the lateral flexing of the neck without the feet moving. Proper lateral flexion requires a relaxed neck to achieve good flexion at the poll as well.

Active Rein – This is when the rein is actively cueing a horse to move its feet.

Inactive Rein – This is when the rein is not cueing the feet to move. For example, when teaching lateral flexion at a stand-still we only want the neck to bend, not the feet to move.

Vertical Flexion – Causing the horse to flex its neck vertically. This requires a soft feel with no resistance in the nose and neck. The better the horse knows lateral flexion, the better its vertical flexion will be.

Direct Rein – Communicates directly to the front foot on the same side of the horse as the rein, to move that foot laterally (sideways).

Indirect rein – Used to control the movement of the opposite hind leg of the rein being used. Example: The right rein is used indirectly to cause the left hind foot to step sideways to the left.

Leading Rein - When a rein is used to "lead" the front quarters across laterally, as in a proper turn.

Supporting Rein - Supports the leading rein. The opposite rein of the leading rein, laid against the horse's neck. Neck reined horses move off the supporting rein.

Impulsion – Controlled forward energy. Necessary for proper collection and athletic performance. It is virtually impossible to control the movement and placement of the feet of a horse with improper or no impulsion.

Independent Seat – This is the ability of the rider to actually ride the horse and not have to balance against the horse's mouth via the reins, or hold on with the legs. A balanced, independent seat is in harmony with the horse's center of gravity in all circumstances and at all times.

Collection – This is when a horse gathers himself into an athletic position. There are two aspects of collection: physical and mental. The horse that is physically collected but mentally scattered will usually have to be physically held in position which leads to insensitivity to the bit and leg cues as well as loss of focus. It can also cause horses to be "hot" and even explosive. Proper collection absolutely requires a relaxed horse with good impulsion and a soft feel in its mouth and sides. It also requires an absolute independent seat from the rider to avoid unwittingly applying pressure to the horse's mouth or sides as the rider tries to keep their balance. A well trained horse should collect himself when asked, and should not have to be physically held in a collected position with excessive force, meaning more than just a few ounces of pressure. Light contact is all that should be required to communicate to the horse that you wish it to stay in a collected position.

Rein/Bit Contact – Gently laying your hand on a blind person's shoulder and guiding their movement across a busy street is "Contact". Grabbing them and forcibly pushing or pulling them where you wish them to go is heavy handed, aggressive and offensive, and will trigger resistance from the blind person. Rein/bit contact of this type triggers the same reactions in a horse, and also triggers Opposition Reflex (manifested as high head, pushing into the bit, etc.). This often causes the rider to resort to some apparatus to hold the horse in a collected position. Constant pulling on a horse's mouth and calling it "contact" will create a hard mouthed, stiff necked and resentful horse that will also probably be "dead sided" since it will take more and more leg/spur pressure to drive the horse into the bit. Continuous rein/bit contact is appropriate only when a horse has a soft feel and the rider has an independent seat and a true understanding of the word "contact". Untouched horses naturally have a soft feel for their environment and stimuli around them – it takes a human to harden them up.

Neck Rein – This is a term used in Western Riding describing when a horse moves off the supporting rein alone during a turn.

Drive Line – This is the imaginary line drawn vertically down the side of the horse approximately where the saddle cinch is located. Pressure behind this line moves a horse forward. Pressure in front of this line stops a horse unless it has been allowed (and taught) to push through it.

Engaging The Hindquarters – This is when both hind quarters are moving parallel to one another, allowing the horse to use them to propel itself forward. We say a horse "drives from behind", meaning its forward power is in its hind quarters.

Disengaging The Hindquarters – This is when we cause the hind legs to step sideways and across in front of one another, taking away the ability of the horse to propel itself forward. This is very helpful in getting an unruly horse under control, and is also helpful in many other aspects of training.