THE AIDS

The horse should respond to the lightest possible aids. All horses are sensitive and can learn to respond to small aids. Every time you give an aid the horse must respond, and every time the horse gives the correct response to an aid you must lessen it. You should always know ahead of time what you want when you give the aid, and then make sure that the horse gave you the correct answer.

There are many horses that don't know how they should respond to the aids. They have simply never been taught, and therefore cannot be blamed for not answering correctly. Often when the situation arises where a student is displeased with the way his horse works, it is because the horse does not understand the language—the aids. How is the horse to have a fair chance of giving the correct answer? If you speak Chinese to an American you cannot expect him to be able to answer, no matter how correctly you speak Chinese.

The rider must learn to give the aids with the right timing and feeling, and the horse must learn to respond at the same moment that the aids are given. When there is a delay between the signal and the answer, it will result in misunderstanding, tension and resistance in the horse. A delay in response also encourages the rider to incorrectly prolong the aid and fail to give a release, spiraling into a situation that we want to avoid, causing the rider to give stronger and stronger aids in order for the horse to respond. You should get two things when you use an aid: the horse answers the aid and the rider follows by releasing the aid. If this cannot be achieved, then the horse will lean into the aid and respond with tension, and the aid will create something negative.

THE DRIVING AIDS

The most important of the aids are the driving aids. These aids consist primarily of the seat and legs, and secondarily of the whip and voice. When you apply the driving aids it is important that the horse responds by going forward. If he does, he is obedient, but in addition to obedience we must also look at how the horse used his energy to move forward. It's important to keep in mind that the driving leg aids works completely against the horse's instinct, as his instinct tells him to move against pressure. Therefore, we must teach the horse to move forward from driving leg aids. To learn to use his energy correctly, the horse needs help from his rider. If your horse answers the driving aids correctly, you must get the following responses:

- You should feel that the horse develops so much energy from the thrust/push in his hind legs that some of it flows from his hind end, forward through his hole topline and all the way out to the bit. This should make the back muscles more actively involved in the work and as a

result the back should swing more.

- When the back muscles begin to work, tensions and stiffness disappear. This can be equated to the situation where a dam across a river is removed and the water can flow freely - the energy can move freely from the hindquarters through the back and out through the bit.
- When the rider feels that the energy flows from the hind quarters through the back and out into the bit, the horse should react by making his neck longer and reaching out to the bit. Consequently, it should feel as if the energy is moving freely through the horse from his hind feet through his top line and out to the bit.
- The rider should feel through his hands that the horse seeks to maintain a contact with the bit. A correct contact feels like holding someone's hand: you can feel the person's hand and he or she can feel yours. If we do not feel that steady contact, we have to admit that energy is not coming through the topline.
- The end result is that the horse is more supple, with increased bending of the joints and increased activity in the muscles.

When the horse answers our signals in this manner, we can feel that he becomes straight. He develops a round topline. All the muscles in his body are working. The horse is able to balance correctly when he has learned to respond appropriately to the rider's aids. So, when he gives us all the correct responses, we can say the driving aids are going through.

When applying the driving aids, it is important that we give the horse something to go forward to —a contact with the bit—so it is important to maintain a consistent, light contact to the horse's mouth. If the reins become too loose, we risk causing the horse to think backwards, which is a bad fault. The horse seeks something to go forward to.

To teach the horse to respond correctly to the driving aids, begin at the walk. At the walk you and your horse will have more time to get a feel for coordinating the aids. Start out on the track where it's easier to keep your horse straight. Once it works well on the track, take your work all over the arena. We want to make things as easy as possible to give the horse the best chance to succeed.

An experienced rider can teach the horse to respond in various ways to the driving aids. For example, the rider can use the driving aids to:

- Encourage the horse's hind legs to become more active without increasing the speed.
- Drive the horse forward so that the horse feels more uphill.
- Signal to the horse to move his forelegs further out in front of him, thereby making it more

difficult for him to carry weight on his front legs and creating more expression.

- Cause the horse to increase the activity in his hind legs, thereby moving the energy up into his back muscles and energizing them.
- Develop more cadence in the trot and more bounce in the canter.
- Create a feeling of having more horse in front of the leg than behind.

We can achieve these various results by combining the driving aids with some of the other aids.

Most common mistakes:

- The horse does not understand how to respond correctly to these aids.
- The rider does not apply the driving aids when they are needed or with the correct timing.

THE RESISTING AIDS

The resisting aids should never be used alone, but always in conjunction with the driving aids. The primary function of the resisting aids is to contain the energy that the rider instills in the horse.

I want to explain why the rider should never use the resisting aids without driving the horse forward at the same time. Many riders tend to do this because to them, it feels as if the horse already has too much forward energy, and consequently it feels unnecessary to drive him more forward.

In reality, when a rider applies resisting aids, it is because he wants the horse to do something specific with his body. And that 'something' requires a certain amount of energy. However, the energy that already exists in the horse is being used for another purpose, such as to run forward or to create tension. This existing energy is already being used. When the rider uses resisting aids without driving the horse forward at the same time, the horse will become tense and resistant. It is physically impossible for the horse to respond correctly to the resisting aids unless the rider applies driving aids at the same time.

The lightest form of resisting aids is when the rider straightens his upper body while at the same time sitting a little deeper in the saddle, and lightly embracing the horse with his lower legs. If, at the same time, the rider lightly squeezes the reins, so that they meet and constrain the energy that was created by the driving aids, the rider can communicate to the horse that he is now supposed to move his hind legs further in under himself.

You can get a good idea for how to use your seat in this situation by sitting on the edge of a chair

and making it tilt.
It would be wrong for the rider to squeeze his thighs, as this would result in the rider's seat being pushed up out of the saddle, which in turn invites the horse to move his hind legs out behind him.

One of the most important outcomes of using the resisting aids is the giving, or 'letting go' that should take place immediately after the horse responds correctly to the rider's signal. Always remember that the bit is something we drive the horse forward to, and not something that we pull backwards on.

Often, a rider may need to give a resisting aid with the outside rein. It is not unusual, in this case, for the horse to lean against the resisting aid (on the side that it was given). When this happens, the rider should practice giving the resisting aid, while at the same time moving the horse laterally by using his leg on the same side. So, basically ride a leg yield or counter shoulder-in by using the leg on the same side as the resisting rein.

Most common mistakes:

- The horse does not understand how to respond correctly to these aids.
- The rider's arms are too stiff or tense.
- The rider applies the resisting aids without applying the driving aids at the same time.
- The rider fails to 'give' or release once the horse responds correctly to the resisting aids.
- The horse has not learned how to respond correctly to the driving aids.

In order to clearly understand how the resisting aids influence the horse, you should read the chapter called *The Good and the Bad*.

THE WEIGHT AIDS

The weight aids are used when the rider wants the horse to change direction – for example to go through a corner, or to make a circle or a turn. The weight aids are also used to tell the horse to execute lateral movements.

To start with, the rider should sit as centered on the horse as possible. This is always true when the horse is on a straight line. In some cases, it is also true when riding the horse on a curved path, such as when working your horse straight on bent tracks with no bending.

When the rider moves his weight in a certain direction, it signals to the horse which direction to go. When the rider looks in the direction in which he wants to go, and at the same time shifts his weight in that direction, the horse should follow the rider's weight. In order for this to happen, there must be harmony between horse and rider, which means that the horse must have placed his body in under that of the rider, with the result that horse and rider end up with one common center of gravity. At that point, the horse will feel as if the rider's weight is part of his own weight. One way to visualize this concept is to imagine that the rider's weight is to the horse, as a perfectly fitted glove is to the hand that is wearing it. The rider's weight does not hinder the horse in any way, and from the horse's perspective feels like a part of himself.

The rider often needs to sit on the inside seat bone when riding a sideward movement in order to encourage the horse to move his inside hind leg more in under himself. This is necessary when the horse executes movements such as circles, turns, leg yields, and other lateral movements. However, when the rider increases the weight over the inside seat bone, it is still necessary for him to follow the horse's direction of movement. That means, the rider should move his weight into the direction he wants the horse to go in the next stride. Never sit where the horse was, or where he is right now. Instead, sit where you want him to go next. Don't forget that the horse has been taught that his place is always right under the rider. It is completely wrong for the rider to attempt to move the horse by trying to push him away with his weight aids. Do not push the horse away from you, but rather take the horse with you.

One big mistake that many riders make is to give half-hearted aids. An example of this is when a rider asks the horse to do a leg yield but is not sure if or how the horse is going to do it. This causes the rider to wait for the horse's response, and only when he is sure that the horse is beginning to move sideways, does he start to follow the horse with his weight. But this is much too late. In a situation like this the rider has asked the horse to do a leg yielding and at the same time asked him not to do one.

Another example is when the rider is a bit unsure of himself but still decides to make a canter

depart. He wonders, "Will the horse canter? When will he do it? And what might happen?" This uncertainty makes the rider wait, and only finally go with the horse once he has started to canter. Once again, it is far too late.

When you ask the horse to execute a movement, it is very important that you believe the horse will do it. To ask the horse to perform a movement and not be moving your own body in that direction from the very beginning, will only make the horse confused. As mentioned earlier, the horse has been taught to follow the rider; in essence to copy him. So, if the rider does not go first and lead the way, but rather pushes the horse away from him, it will only make the horse nervous and suspicious. Remember:

- The horse should follow the rider's weight and not be pushed away from it.
- The rider should think, "Come with me."
- The rider can never show the horse the way if he follows the horse.

On the other hand, if the rider thinks, "Now I am going to make a canter depart to the right. You can stay here if you'd like, but I am going to canter." and then sits in a way that influences the horse as if he was already in canter right lead, most horses will go along with the rider and make a right lead canter depart in order to avoid a feeling of disharmony between him and the rider. This way of thinking and riding also has the advantage that if the horse does as the rider is thinking and doing, he will take the canter lead that the rider intends. Whereas, sitting and waiting to see what the horse will do, leaves the horse to make the decision while the rider follows him, resulting in mistakes.

Most common mistakes:

- The horse does not understand how to respond correctly to these aids.
- The rider does not sit exactly in the middle of the horse when the situation requires it.
- The rider tries to push the horse away from him with the weight aid.
- The rider collapses his hip which causes his weight to be placed in the opposite direction than he intended.

RIDING TO THE OUTSIDE REIN

The horse should be ridden forward, equally to both reins when he is working on a ***straight track***.

On the other hand, on ***curved lines*** the horse should go forward to the outside rein, let go the

inside of his body and as a result, release all tension. ***The inside leg drives the horse forward to the outside rein. The outside rein 'catches up' or receives the energy.*** This creates a stable but light contact with the outside rein. This is called using the diagonal aids.

When the horse is free, without a rider on his back, he moves in a different manner than we would like him to move when he is carrying a rider. This is because, while carrying a rider, the horse needs to frame himself differently in order to carry this extra weight. This is exactly the same for us when we have to carry something. We change our frame in order to stay in balance.

When the horse turns and changes direction without a rider on his back, he naturally bends to the outside and shifts his weight forward and inward. But we require that when a horse carries a rider, he holds himself as upright as possible while at the same time placing the major part of his weight on his hindquarters. This should also take place while he is traveling on bent tracks. In order for this to be possible, the horse must be ridden from inside leg to outside rein.

To better understand why the horse should be ridden forward to the outside rein, it is necessary to understand what happens when the horse travels on a bent track while taking too much support on the inside rein, or simply does not seek the contact on the outside rein. The reason that the horse wants to take support from the inside rein is often because he is trying to move in the same manner as he does without a rider. It is not because he is disobedient, but because he is used to moving in this manner when he is free, and he feels at home there. But if the horse is allowed to do this, he will put too much weight on the forehand, and not utilize the carrying power of his back muscles, and his hind legs will not step in under him.

When the horse is ridden onto a bent track with too much weight on his forehand, he is forced to move that weight onto the inside shoulder and perhaps even bend to the outside in order to keep his balance. As a result, the horse becomes tense and loses the ability to step in under his body with his hind legs, which should be carrying more of the weight. If the rider should succeed in bending such a tense horse to the inside, he will have done so by pulling on the inside rein, which in turn will probably make the horse tilt his head and fall on the forehand even more.

Another reason that the horse might lean on the inside rein is because he does not respond correctly to the re-balancing half halts. Half-halts are a prerequisite for the horse to be able to balance himself on bent tracks, and when they do not go through, the horse falls on his forehand.

A young horse, or a horse that does not have the correct basic education, must first learn to move from the inside leg to the outside rein. If he has not learned this, we cannot expect him to be able to move freely and in balance on bent tracks.

Now let us go back to the rider who is riding his horse correctly on a bent track. The rider begins

by making half-halts to move enough of the weight off the horse's front legs and onto his hind legs as is necessary, so that he can stay in balance as he moves from the straight line onto the bent track. See the chapter called *Riding Through Corners*. When the half-halts are effective and the center of gravity moves further back, the horse will become more willing to follow the rider's weight, as it moves more inward on bent tracks. The rider moves his weight inward by lowering the inside heel and inside knee, while at the same time moving the inside hip slightly forward. When the rider does this, he must be careful not to collapse the inside hip which would shift his weight in the wrong direction.

Most common mistakes:

- The horse does not understand how to respond correctly to this aid.
- The rider lets the outside rein go, losing contact.
- The horse leans against the outside rein.
- The rider collapses his inside hip when using the inside leg to drive the horse into the outside rein.
- The rider pulls back on the outside rein instead of meeting or catching up the energy.

THE INSIDE LEG

The inside leg has various functions, depending on what we want the horse to do. It is normally placed about a hand's width behind the girth where, together with the seat and outside leg, it acts to drive the horse forward.

The inside leg can also have a suppling effect. This effect takes place when you are yielding your horse off your inside leg or using it to make your horse reach and stretch forward and down to the outside rein.

When the horse is on a bent track, the inside leg should be placed at the girth. It is this leg that the horse bends around, and that, together with a slightly forward placed inside hip, drives the horse out to the outside rein. It also serves to activate the horse's inside hind leg.

In a leg yield, the inside leg will normally be placed a little further back. Its task is to create an energy that moves diagonally through the horse's body to the outside rein and to activate the inside hind leg.

You may hear the expression, you can "move the horse off of the inside leg." This, however, is not possible. When the rider sits on the horse, he is part of the horse's weight. To claim that the

rider can push the horse out by using his inside leg when he is sitting on top of the horse, is the same as saying that a person can lift himself up by his own hair. If the rider tries to move the horse by pushing with his leg, he is working against the laws of nature. In reality, when a rider applies pressure with the inside leg in a lateral movement, the inside leg creates the energy that moves diagonally out to the outside rein.

It is not wrong to say that the horse moves away or gives to the inside leg as long as we understand what it really means.

Most common mistakes:

- The horse does not understand how to respond correctly to this aid.
- The inside leg is not in contact with the horse.
- The inside leg is placed too far back.
- The rider did not make sure that he got a timely and correct answer.

THE OUTSIDE LEG

The outside leg (together with the inside leg) acts to drive the horse forward when he is working on straight lines. It is normally placed slightly behind the girth.

While making circles and turns, the rider's outside leg should act to prevent the haunches from falling out. Should the haunches fall out, it would lead to the horse falling on his forehand. Also, the horse should not move the outside hind leg out to the side where it will act as a 'training wheel.' If this happens, the energy from the outside hind leg will move diagonally forward to the inside shoulder, making it difficult to bend the horse and causing the horse to resist the inside rein.

In many cases its task is also to work together with the outside rein to meet and contain the energy which is created by the inside leg. And during such movements as turns on the haunches and lateral work, the rider's outside leg activates the horse's outside hind leg to encourage it to step further in under the horse's body. The outside leg is also helping to develop collection, such as in half-passes, shoulder-in and other movements.

Most common mistakes:

- The horse does not understand how to respond correctly to this aid.
- The rider's outside leg is not steady.

- The rider uses his outside leg too much.

THE OUTSIDE REIN

The outside rein – in addition to being the rein that the horse is ridden out to on bent tracks – works together with the outside leg to create and control the horse's carriage and bend. And it is the outside rein and leg that straighten the horse out of a bend.

The outside rein also acts in a resisting fashion, as needed during many of the lateral movements (see the section on resisting aids above). In this case the outside rein may not be so resisting that the horse can't bend. For example, during turn on the haunches, circles and sometimes half pass, the rider's outside hand needs to move a little closer to the weathers and towards the horse's mouth.

The outside rein can also act to lead the horse in a certain direction, to show him the way. But, be careful that this does not invite him to fall onto his outside shoulder.

Most common mistakes:

- The horse does not understand how to respond correctly to this aid.
- The rider does not establish a steady connection to the horse's mouth with the outside rein so that the horse has this rein to go out to.

THE INSIDE REIN

The inside rein acts to position or bend the horse while he is on a bent track, as well as during many other movements, and should always be used in conjunction with the inside leg. The inside rein is also used to lead the horse in a certain direction, to show him the way, for instance in a turn on the haunches.

The inside rein can also act to support the inside leg. For example, this supporting inside rein is often used to help the horse learn to leg yield, by moving it slightly away from his neck.

Most common mistakes:

- The horse does not understand how to respond correctly to this aid.
- The rider tries to make the horse give by pulling too much on the inside rein.
- The rider uses the inside rein too much when positioning or bending the horse, instead of riding him forward to the outside rein.

- The rider hangs in the inside rein.
- The horse is brought onto his forehand by the rider using the inside rein too much or in the wrong way, for example when the rider tries to force the horse's head down, which is a severe mistake.

HOW THE RIDER'S SEAT INFLUENCES THE HORSE

The rider's seat should be placed in the middle of the saddle at its deepest point. It is very important that the rider's seat is relaxed and not working against the horse.

The rider can use his seat to give the horse various signals, so it is also considered one of the aids. For example, the seat, together with the rider's legs, can act to drive the horse forward. The rider can also dictate the tempo in which he wants the horse to work by giving the driving aids in that tempo. The seat can be used with a resisting effect as well, when the rider sits more deeply in the saddle, such as in making half-halts.

Sometimes it's very helpful to the horse for the rider to sit with a little lighter seat for a few strides, taking weight off his back and then return again to a soft seat. This helps the horse to bring the back up and relaxed the back muscles.

The position of the rider's hips also has an important effect. The inside hip should be moved forward when working on bent tracks and in a number of the movements, basically anytime bending occurs. This in essence is a signal to the horse to move his inside hip forward, and as a consequence carry more weight on the inside hind leg.

Most common mistakes:

- The horse does not understand how to respond to this aid.
- The rider does not sit straight over the horse and consequently ends up with more weight on one seat bone than the other.
- The rider's seat works against the horse.
- The resisting aids do not go through. This results in the rider sitting with a braced, resisting seat, which works against the horse.

BODY LANGUAGE

The horse is a very sensitive animal, which is to our benefit. When the rider is on a horse that is attentive to him, and is respectful of him as his leader, it is important for the rider to be self-

assured in his demeanor. It is a fact that the horses will tend to mirror their riders, even more than we may be aware. So, try to be as you want the horse to be (and become), instead of being as the horse is, here and now. For instance, if the horse is tense, and you also become tense, it will reinforce the tension in the horse. If the horse is lazy and you are too, the horse will become, if possible, even lazier. And if you hang in the reins, the horse will hang in the reins as well.

It is important that you always know what you want from your horse and have a vision of how your horse should look and feel underneath you. For example:

- Do you want your horse to increase his concentration and focus on his work?
- Do you want your horse to be more relaxed, supple or balanced?
- Does your horse need to feel more energetic or more stable?

As a rider, you can have a huge influence on your horse by feeling in your own body the same way you want your horse to feel. This is not always easy and perhaps is the secret that makes the successful and natural riders what they are.

THE SECONDARY AIDS

The secondary aids are the voice, the whip and the spurs.

THE VOICE

The voice can be used to encourage, to give commands and to praise. It can also be used to calm the horse. The rider can also use his voice to drive the horse forward and to create more energy. But remember, the horse does not understand your language. And sometimes riders talk too much to their horses. For example, the rider may talk in order to calm himself or to give himself courage.

Most common mistakes:

- The rider uses his voice too much.
- Some riders need to make sure that they don’t sound hysterical.
- It is illegal to use the voice during competition.

THE WHIP

The horse should respect the whip but **never be afraid of it.** The whip should primarily be used to reinforce those aids that speak to the horse’s hind legs, almost as an extra leg. That is, to help

the horse understand that when the rider drives, the horse should become more active in his hind legs. If the horse does not become more active as a result of the rider's driving aids, the rider can use the whip on the horse's hind quarter to help him understand that the signal from the rider is speaking to the hind legs, and that he should response from that end. But never use the whip instead of the legs.

It can be advantageous to use a shorter and thicker whip on young horses, since young horses can be particularly sensitive to whips. A short bamboo whip works well at this stage since it is not flexible and is not likely to touch the horse unexpectedly.

Most common mistakes:

- The horse becomes afraid of the whip.
- The whip is used too much.
- The whip is used inappropriately.
- The rider uses the whip instead of the leg.

THE SPURS

In order to use spurs the rider must be able to keep his legs quiet. The spurs reinforce the leg, in much the same way as the whip. However, the spurs are often used way too much. It is a good idea to ride the horse without spurs fairly often. When spurs are used correctly, they will make the horse more sensitive to your leg aids.

Most common mistakes:

- The spurs are used too much.
- The spurs are unnecessarily long.

THE AIDS NO ONE SPEAKS ABOUT

There are no aids that trainers want to keep secret, but there are aids that are only know and used by experienced riders. These types of aids don't even have a name. But the way a rider uses an aid, the timing, the combination of them and the feeling, give many extra signals. These aids can only be learned through training and more training. I don't believe that any person can be old enough to have had the time to learn them all.

For example, a rider can use the driving aids, and by the manner in which he uses them, get the horse to respond in a variety of ways. By combining the various aids in different ways, a rider

can ask the horse to increase the tempo, to become more active behind without increasing the tempo, to reach forward more with his front legs, to shape his frame so that he feels more uphill, to develop more cadence, to be more supple, to have more bounce in the canter, to lengthen his neck, etc. Only your imagination sets the limits.

TIMING

It is important that the rider gives the aids at the correct moment. If he does not, it is almost like speaking Japanese to a Norwegian. If the rider does not have the feeling for giving an aid at the right moment, he will give the signal too late for the horse to be able to respond correctly. But it is also important that the horse responds at the same moment the aid is given.

Any time lapse between the giving of the aid and the response will create a negative effect.

For example, if the rider gives a resisting aid, where he stretches “up-ward”, the horse should respond by the time you say “ward”. In other words, the horse should be answering in the instant where the rider is finishing the execution of the aid. If the horse does not respond in a timely fashion, the rider will not come to a point where he can take the aid off the horse, but instead, he will get stuck in the aid. As a result, the horse will become tense and resistant. It is the act of removing the aid that makes the horse understand the rider is pleased with his response to the aid. So, once the rider has given an aid, (regardless of which one it is) and the horse has responded correctly, that aid should cease immediately.

The horse should learn to respond to the aid immediately. This of course assumes that he understands the aid and that the rider is consistent. And remember, the best way to reward the horse is not to give him carrots or sugar, but to stop using the aid and take the pressure off.