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The warmup begins from the time you sit in the saddle, so make the best use of it. These exercises can provide a nice change of routine if you and your horse have become arena-sour over the long winter months.

Get the Most From Your Warm-up

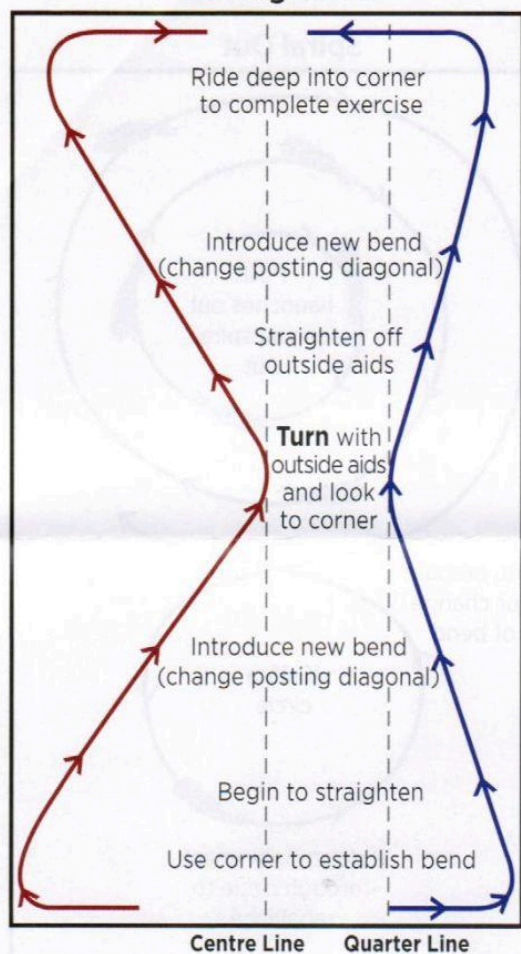
No matter what your discipline, these simple exercises will set up a better ride in the schooling arena or the show ring

by Sheri Spencer, CEMT, PTS

Every great ride must begin with a warm-up. For our horses, this means a logical progression of increasing intensity that best prepares them for the demands of the ride. Not only will our horses be more physically and mentally prepared, but it reduces risk of injury.

The warm-up begins the moment we're in the saddle. Encourage a long, forward-reaching neck towards the bit by allowing your pelvis to fully 'scoop' with the rhythm of the walk. For a more active walk, apply your calf as your hip rises on the same side, catching that hindfoot while it is airborne. Similarly, a rushing walk can be metered by limiting the range of your pelvic movement and decreasing the tempo if necessary.

Bending Lines



Bending Lines

Applicable in every gait, bending lines introduce a change of bend and are an excellent way to fortify balance between the inside and outside aids. Because of the change in bend, it can also prove to the young horse that over-bending and drifting is actually more difficult, and in turn improves straightness. Just as effective for the rider, it conditions us to be centred and square in the saddle, as we also have to be able to readily adjust to the changing of the bend.

As part of your warm-up at the walk, focus on accuracy of the pattern and correctness of travel through the horse's body. Take advantage of your corner, using the turn to create the bend for the movement, and keep your eyes focused through the turn to a point on the wall above the centre-point. It's easiest to begin with your centre-point of the bend at the quarter-line where the bend is more gradual. Once you've practiced in both directions, deepen the bend by riding to the centre-line and back.

After practicing both directions at the walk, move up to the trot and repeat the exercise, focusing on riding as accurately as possible and

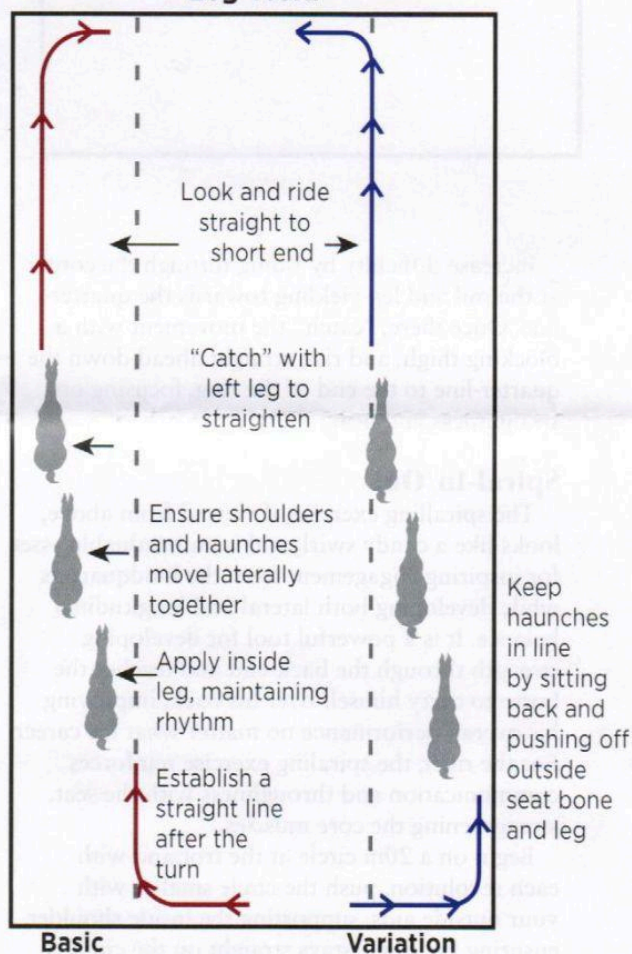
using your eyes to help you ride straight. Begin preparing for the change of bend as soon as you're through the turn and look for your centre-point. Change your posting diagonal as you change the bend with your "new" inside leg, then use your outside seatbone and leg to push the horse around the bend at the centre-point. Look back to the wall 1-2 strides from the corner and ride straight ahead, asking for the change of bend in preparation for the corner by changing your posting, shifting your weight to the outside, and hugging the inside leg at the girth. Try to ride as deeply into the corner as you can, circling if needed to reinforce the correct bend.

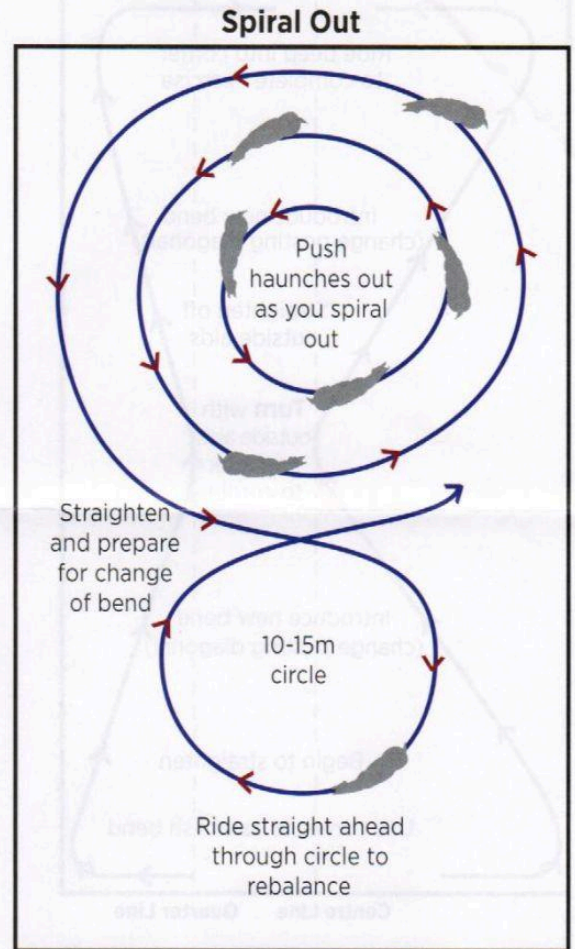
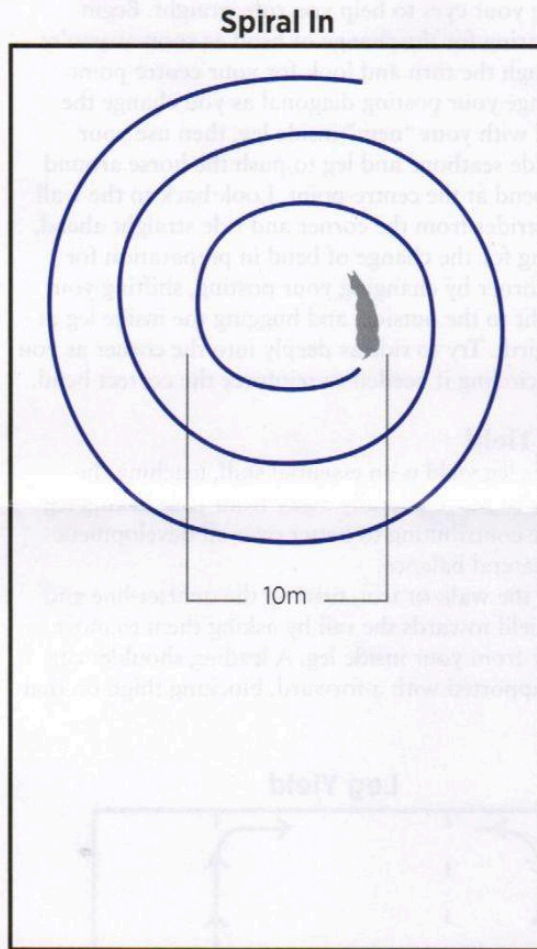
Leg Yield

The leg yield is an essential skill, teaching the horse to move laterally away from your asking leg while contributing to better over-all development and lateral balance.

At the walk or trot, turn up the quarter-line and leg-yield towards the rail by asking them to move away from your inside leg. A leading shoulder can be supported with a forward, blocking thigh on that side.

Leg Yield





Variation with Balancing Circle

Increase difficulty by riding through the corner at the rail and leg-yielding towards the quarter-line. Once there, “catch” the movement with a blocking thigh, and ride straight ahead down the quarter-line to the end of the ring, focusing on straightness and using the corner.

Spiral-In/Out

The spiralling exercise, if viewed from above, looks like a candy swirl, and is an invaluable asset for inspiring engagement from the hindquarters while developing both lateral and longitudinal balance. It is a powerful tool for developing strength through the back-end and teaches the horse to carry himself over his back, improving his overall performance no matter what his career. For the rider, the spiraling exercise reinforces communication and throughness with the seat, strengthening the core muscles.

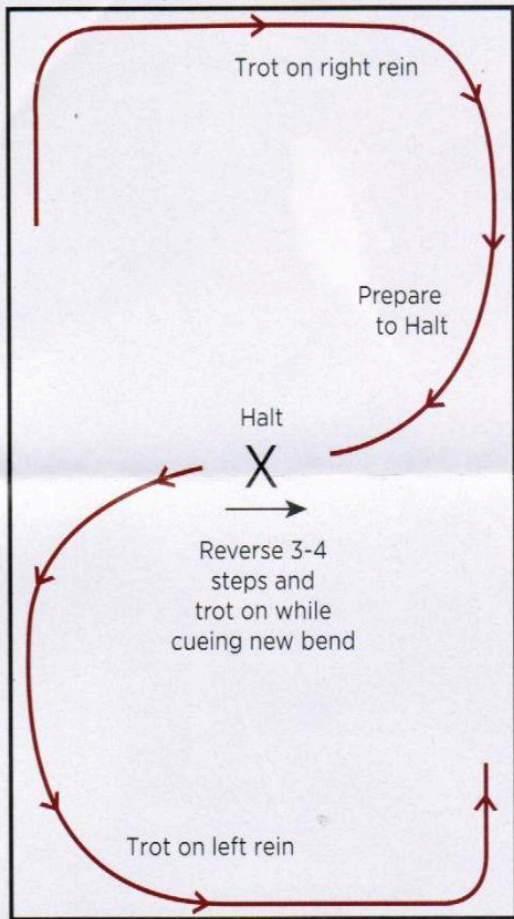
Begin on a 20m circle at the trot and with each revolution, push the circle smaller with your outside aids, supporting the inside shoulder, ensuring the horse stays straight on the circle. It

should take 3 to 4 revolutions to work down to a 10m circle where the challenge is maintaining proper balance and rhythm with the deeper lateral flexion. After one revolution, gently push off your inside leg, supporting with the outside thigh to keep the horse straight. Return to the 20m circle within 3 to 4 revolutions.

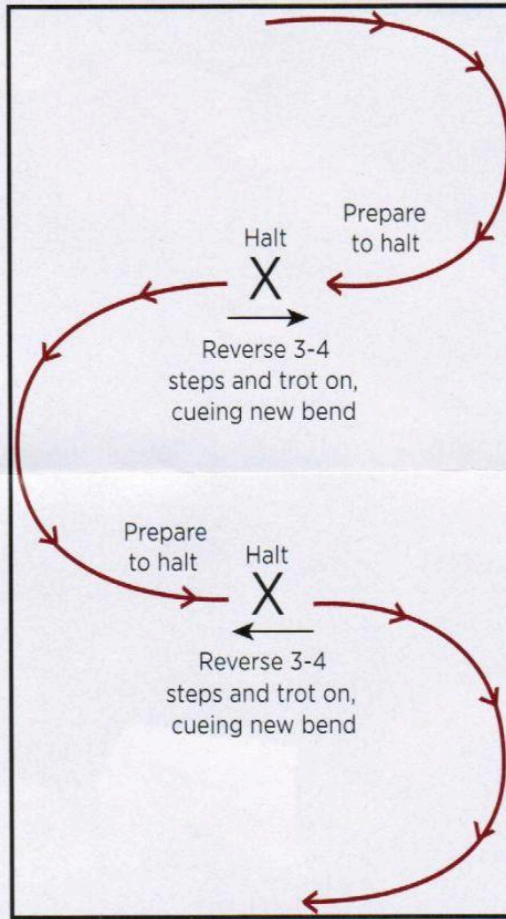
Maintain your posture by keeping the shoulders back and squared with your core aimed in the direction of travel. Use your seat to not only guide the lateral movement, but support the stride length as well while the horse adjusts to the changing size of the circle.

For increased challenge or as a corrective measure for a younger horse who may seek to rush back to the rail, ask for a haunches-out by bringing your upper body back with your weight positioned slightly to the inside. It can be helpful to return to the walk while on the 10m circle, and walk out haunches-out to “package” the horse. Additionally, circling in the opposite direction once you return to the 20m circle will help rebalance the horse.

Halt/Reverse/Trot On



Halt/Reverse/Trot On Serpentine



Halt, Reverse, Trot On

This exercise inspires “jumping” power and tunes the response for forward aids while developing the fast-twitch muscle fibres essential for strength over fences.

Halt from the trot, then squeeze forward into a reverse for 3 to 4 steps. While the outside fore (and inside hind) is airborne in the reverse, push for an upward transition into a trot.

Increase the difficulty by performing the exercise at the change of direction in a figure-eight or three-loop serpentine.

Playing with variations and including changes of rein will keep things more interesting while further developing overall strength and education in the horse. By including progressively technically difficult exercises in the warm-up, both horse and rider will develop problem-solving skills. With the refined communication and increased athleticism, horse and rider will be that much more able to work as a team – whatever the course brings. 🐾

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