

Key Concepts:

- Always hold the lead shank by the rope portion, never by the chain (to avoid personal injury).
- You always want to face the direction you are traveling, and look ahead to where you want to go.
- The hand closest to the horse's head will hold the rope portion of the lead shank just below where the chain ends.
- The hand furthest from the horse's head will hold the excess lead. Fold any excess lead up in an accordion fashion so that you or the horse do not trip on it.

Troubleshooting: Do NOT coil the excess lead into a loop, as this could potentially tighten around your hand if the horse spooks and runs away (you could get dragged along behind the horse because you can't get your hand free in time!).

Leading a Horse: (see video)

In general, leading is always done from the left ("near") side of the horse. Hold the lead shank by the rope portion using your right hand, and face forward. Fold any excess lead up in an accordion fashion so that you or the horse do not trip on it, and hold it in the left hand (as shown in the video)

Walk facing forwards at all times, looking where you are going. That way you are able to see what obstacles are ahead and respond appropriately. (The person in the video felt self conscious about the camera and did not look up as much as she should have at first!)

Troubleshooting: It is a common observation that students who are unfamiliar with horses or lacking confidence will walk along while staring at their horse the whole time – this can result in bumping into objects (like people or other horses), and can result in injury! Look where you are going! (You'll still be able to see your horse out of the corner of your eye, don't worry...)

When leading the horse, you should aim to stay between their head and shoulder.

Troubleshooting: Getting ahead of the horse does not allow you to get out of the way should they spook, nor does it permit you to see what they are doing. Similarly, being positioned behind the horse's shoulder gives you no control over the horse (the distance between your hand and the head is too great) plus it puts you in a bad spot should the horse jump sideways – they will land on you!

- **Turning the Horse:**

When turning the horse, it is ideal to turn them away from you (as demonstrated in the video) so that they do not step on your feet. Look ahead where you are going at all times.

Troubleshooting: Turning the horse away from you is easily accomplished in larger spaces. However, if you are in a tight hallway (or in the horse's stall), turning them away from you becomes difficult because you will get squished into the wall. **In those instances only**, turning the horse towards you is permissible. However, watch your feet carefully!

- **Stopping the Horse:**

Most horses will automatically stop when you stop walking. If not, then apply pressure to the horse's nose by gently pulling on the lead shank. Verbally signaling by saying "whoa" is also helpful.

Troubleshooting: If the horse is misbehaving and will not stop, you will need to deliver a more forceful signal by giving a sharp tug on the lead shank (you will only be able to do this by first allowing a little slack on the rope so that you are then able to "snap" the lead). This generally will get the horse's attention enough to regain control. Excessively forceful, sharp tugs on the lead may startle the horse or cause it to rear up, so keep the "snap" moderate (short and sweet!).

Backing the Horse Up: (see video)

As always, you need to see where you are going. Therefore, before backing a horse up, you first need to turn yourself around to face the direction you are heading! As you turn around, switch your hands on the lead shank so that your left hand is on the rope close to the chain and your right hand is holding the residual lead in accordion fashion. Then, apply gentle pressure on the lead with your left hand.

Troubleshooting: Most horses will back up with just gentle pressure on the lead shank from the left hand. If that does not result in them backing up, you can also gently touch their shoulder with your right hand (but don't actually try to push their shoulder backwards – you are no match for a horse!).

When you have backed the horse up, turn yourself back around to face forward again (and switch your hands back on the lead shank). It is good horsemanship to always have the horse take a step or two forward after backing up, so that they do not start to think that evading you by backing away is a good habit (this is not demonstrated in the video).

Leading a Horse Past other People or Horses: (No video)

In general, you want to keep yourself between your horse and other people. Therefore, when walking a horse down a hallway filled with people, you need to ask **ALL** of the people to stand on the same side of the hallway as each other. That way, you can lead the horse past them safely while keeping yourself between the horse and the people.

When leading your horse past other horses, an easy guide is to follow the same “rules of the road” as driving in Canada (stay on the right side of the road). When you pass another person (and horse) coming from the opposite direction, both people should be on the inside, so that between you, you can both keep the horses from turning their hindquarters in to kick the other horse.

[Troubleshooting](#): Be careful walking horses down the aisle in the barn where they are housed; if the stall doors have the upper gate open, horses in their stalls may stick their head out and nip (bite) your horse as it passes by! To avoid this, plan ahead – either make sure that the aisle is empty so that you are able to lead the horse down the centre of the aisle (out of harm’s way), or preemptively close the upper gates on the other stall doors so that horses can’t reach out while you are working in the aisle with your horse.

Holding a Horse When Another Person is Working with It: (No video)

If you are holding a horse when another person is working with it, you are responsible for their safety at all times. To adequately protect that person, you need to be very attentive to where they are and what they are doing with the horse at all times. Therefore, you will need to turn your body (and reposition your hands on the lead shank) so that you are always facing that person, and move from side to side on the horse in order to make sure you are on the same side of the horse as the person at all times!

[Troubleshooting](#): Protecting the safety of others when you are the person holding a horse is a full-time commitment. Avoid getting caught up in conversations with others, and **NEVER** allow yourself to be distracted by other activities (such as texting!!!!). Stay focused on the person working with your horse at all times!