

Riding Toward Success

A Study of Teaching Methods That Consistently Produce Competitive Success for  
Equestrians

By

Layne Sanders

A thesis presented to the Honors College of Middle Tennessee State University in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the University Honors College

Riding Toward Success

A Study of Teaching Methods That Consistently Produce Competitive Success for  
Equestrians

By

Layne Sanders

APPROVED:

---

Mrs. Anne Brzezicki  
Horse Science

---

Dr. Rhonda Hoffman  
Horse Science

---

Dr. Rich Barnet  
Recording Industry

---

Dr. Philip E. Phillips  
University Honors College Associate Dean

## **Acknowledgments**

Thank you to Anne Brzezicki for all your endless knowledge about horses and teaching that you were willing to share with me. Thank you for encouraging my interest in teaching and for helping me make this study relevant and far reaching. Thank you to all the participants of this study who took the time to carefully answer my questions and give me incredibly thorough feedback. Thank you to my family who supported me throughout this process and a special thank you to my mom who has given me a wonderful example of what a lifelong educator looks like. I could not have successfully finished this project without the support from each of these people.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments .....	i
List of Figures .....	iii
List of Terms .....	iv
Abstract .....	1
Introduction .....	2
Literature Review .....	3
Methodology .....	5
Results .....	7
Conclusions .....	21
Bibliography .....	24
Appendix .....	25

### **List of Figures**

Figure 1. A graph representing which styles of riding the students have taken lessons in.

Page 16.

Figure 2. A graph representing what students thought was the most difficult aspect when learning how to ride. Page 17.

Figure 3. A graph representing whether students were visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learners. Page 18.

## List of Terms

**Aids:** The use of the body (seat, legs, hands, voice) to achieve a specific response from the horse. It is the manner in which a rider communicates what he/she wants the horse to do through cues given by the rider's body. These will become more sophisticated and effective as the rider progresses.

**Discipline:** A style of riding such as hunter/jumper, dressage, western, eventing etc.

**Collection:** Occurs when the horse carries more of its weight on its hindquarters than its front end. This is normally a slower, more controlled gait. It is a sophisticated maneuver to achieve.

**Extension:** In many ways it is the opposite of collection. The gait becomes less of a carrying gait and more of a pushing gait. This will be a faster gait where the horse is pushing itself forward while extending its front legs forward. It will have less maneuverability than the collected gait.

**Lateral Work:** There are many lateral movements in riding. These involve the horse moving forward and sideways. The degree of sideways and positioning of the horse's shoulder, hindquarters, and placement of feet vary depending on the movement.

**Gymnastics:** A series of poles or jumps with up to two strides between them. There are many different ways to set these up and they greatly improve the riders jumping position, balance, strength, and feel. Among other benefits, they also help improve the horse.

**Lunge:** The horse is attached to a lunge line and moves in a circle around a person in the middle. The rider does not have to control the horse so it is a great way to work on basic position and balance with a beginner rider or to introduce new skills to an intermediate rider.

## **Abstract**

In this study the teaching methods of successful riding instructors were collected and analyzed. Three surveys were performed. There was one for instructors, one for students with over two years of riding instruction, and one for students with less than two years of riding instruction. These surveys showed varied results that were analyzed to discover which methods were the most common and most effective teaching methods. When compared and contrasted, the similarities in the student and instructor responses increased as the years of riding experience increased. The significant results can be found in detail below.

## Introduction

Methodologies that create success have always attracted significant interest — whether in business, sports, education, or any other field. As humans, we want to know how an accomplished individual achieved success. This study will focus on effective riding teachers of competitive students who have reached a measurable level of success. In the study I will concentrate specifically on riding instructors who ride and teach in the Hunter/Jumper discipline.\* Hunter/Jumper is a particular style of English riding that originated in fox hunting in which the horses and riders were required to traverse rivers, fences, brush, and many other natural obstacles, depending on where the hunting dogs led them. Currently, riders competing in Hunter/Jumper competitions must complete what is termed a “jump course,” a pattern of jumps in a riding ring. The Hunter/Jumper discipline is composed of three groups: Show Jumping, Show Hunters, and Equitation.<sup>1</sup> Each of these groups will be included in this study of riding instructors and their methods of teaching. Many different styles of riding are found within the English category. Each style teaches slightly different positions and use of aids\* or cues to get certain responses from the horse. Each discipline may have different expectations of the end result depending on the criteria that could be judged in their specific competition. For this reason, lessons taught by teachers in different disciplines vary greatly. Every teacher may have different focuses and may rank certain skills in a different hierarchy of importance. My interest is specifically in the similarities and

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hunterjumperconnection.com/about-hunter-jumpers.html>

\*Please refer to page iv for definitions.



differences within a single discipline. Most of the riding instructors I questioned were from the Hunter/Jumper discipline, though there were a few who came from other backgrounds.

### **Literature Review**

One of the most common issues with teaching riding today is allowing students to rush through the basics and “specialize” in their specific discipline too early. In her article on teaching beginners, Jan Dawson speaks to the importance of giving riders a strong base from the start. Students must have a secure position from which they can later specialize and successfully ride and compete in the future. Dawson says, “Each skill forms the foundation for the one above. When this is done it is possible to build a strong reliable seat quickly and efficiently thereby greatly shortening the length of time when beginners are so vulnerable.”<sup>2</sup> This philosophy applies to both teaching horses and riders. The manner of building upon each skill as the foundation for the next in a linear and logical manner can be termed as “chaining.” In his book *Effective Teaching and Riding*, Eckart Meyner addresses the importance of understanding the complexity of each rider. He says riders vary in nearly every aspect imaginable: motivation, goals, communication, body types, fitness abilities, intelligence; etc.<sup>3</sup> The differences found in each rider greatly affect the way instructors must teach. Methods that work for one individual may not benefit another. Specific examples of how different teachers deal with

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://asci.uvm.edu/equine/law/articles/beginners.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Eckart Meyners, *Effective Teaching & Riding: Exploring Balance and Motion* (Montana: Goals Unlimited Press 2004), 15.

these complexities found in their riders is something I explored in my study by forming questions for riding instructors that would encourage discussion on how they dealt with commonly occurring issues found in riders.

Meyners also discusses “active learning.” He suggests an action has four components, stating that an action is goal-oriented, motivated, planned, and controlled. Meyners believes that, unfortunately, not all instructors understand the importance of using active learning. In teaching riders who are dealing with horses who have just as widely varying personalities, strengths, and weaknesses as the riders, the ability to analyze is key to teaching both rider and horse in the most effective way possible. The issues arise when an instructor tries to use the same methods of teaching for every student and horse as if they were all identical.<sup>4</sup> Along these same lines, teachers in my survey made it clear that using different horses for different riders depending on their strengths and weaknesses and what they needed to learn was extremely important in progressing students.

Another beneficial book on riding instruction and teaching methods is *Equestrian Education* by Jill Hassler-Scoop. This book stresses the importance of communication in quality instruction. Jill Hassler-Scoop gives a description of “communication highlights” that consists of five main elements of communication: effective listening, asking appropriate questions, using the complete cycle of communications (paraphrasing, clarifying and feedback), “getting on the same page” and positive attitudes and works.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Meyners, *Effective Teaching & Riding*, 144.

<sup>5</sup> Jill Hassler-Scoop, *Equestrian Education: Professional Development for Instructors* (Montana: Goals Unlimited Press, 2002), 87.

These essential components to successful teaching and communication will be explored in this study as well. All of these elements especially listening and asking questions were a part of the responses in my survey of riding instructors.

### **Methodology**

For the purpose of this study, a successful riding teacher will be defined as one (a) who produces riders who consistently win in competitions and (b) who has developed logical, learnable, progressive, and repeatable systems of teaching riding to his/her incoming students in order to achieve predictable outcomes. I expected to discover how these teachers employed their teaching philosophies, goal setting, physical and mental exercises to affect the progress of their students to achieve these outcomes for success in competition.

The plan for the collection of the research information was changed slightly from the original. In the beginning, I planned to collect my information through interviews with the teachers and surveys with the students, but as I continued to work on my project it seemed as though more participants were going to be needed to collect an appropriate amount of data. To handle the increase in participants, I turned all the interviews into online surveys so that the data could be organized more easily and I could make a farther reaching study with participants from all over the United States. I also planned to question only Hunter/Jumper trainers. Although the majority of the participants taught the Hunter/Jumper discipline, there were several who rode or taught in other disciplines. In the end, there were three surveys conducted. There was one survey made for riding instructors which contained the most in-depth questions. The second survey was for riders who had more than two years of riding experience which held questions similar to

---

the ones for the instructors to help with comparison of responses between students and instructors. The third survey was for students with less than two years of riding experience. Not as much information was expected from the third survey because these students had not experienced enough to give a thorough opinion on many of the questions given to the other participants. These students could tell what they expected to happen which could be helpful when compared to what they experience in the future. I was most interested in the responses from the instructors, but to really determine which methods were the most effective I needed some feedback from students who could give their opinions on how different instruction methods worked for their style of learning. Using this method I was able to compare the responses from both the students and the instructors to better understand which teaching methods work the best. The teachers I questioned have students who show in different types of shows within the Hunter/Jumper discipline. Some of these include 4-H, IEA (Interscholastic Equestrian Association), IHSA (Intercollegiate Horse Show Association) and AA rated shows. Because my advisor and I were able to contact many participants personally, we had an overwhelming response to our surveys. There was an 87% response rate from the requested participants in my survey. This number of people who took the time to take my survey was truly unexpected and a little overwhelming. It was a significant amount of information to sift through and analyze, but the results made it all worthwhile. The students and instructors clearly took the time and effort to put thought into their answers so that I received some fascinating results.

The majority of the instructors whom I surveyed have ridden for at least ten years and 90% of them have ridden for over twenty years. About 85% of them have been teaching riding for over twenty years, though there were two people who have been teaching between five and ten years, and one instructor has only taught for less than two years. Most of the participants had competed and ridden in several disciplines, but over 60% of the participants rode in the Hunter/Jumper discipline currently. These instructors range in competition level from 3'6" hunters to international grand prix riders.

### **Results**

Some of my questions required free answers in order to gain the best insight into different methodologies of teaching and so the participants could really explain their answers. My first free answer question was for the participating instructors to identify the skills (ie. circles, transitions, lateral work\*) they consider to differentiate a beginner, intermediate, or advanced rider. As I predicted, this question elicited a variety of answers, but there were certain trends that continually appeared. For beginners, "basic" was the reoccurring word. Beginners have a basic understanding of position and control, they can make simple turns, and they can ride the horse at all three gaits comfortably. The differences between beginner and intermediate students were subtle. An intermediate student has more control of the horse and of their own body. They have control in transitions and some understanding of the importance of timing. They have a more refined position and understand how their body balance and position can affect the horse. The biggest difference between an intermediate and advanced rider is the ability to truly influence the horse. There is not only an understanding of what collection\* and extension\* look like, but an ability to execute these concepts. Lateral work was found in

almost every participant's answers as a skill that advanced riders possess. An advanced rider not only understands the importance of timing, but they can time their aids correctly to get the desired response from their horse the most effectively. If the rider jumps, they have the ability to ride a complex course with lines, bends, and rollbacks, and they understand how the mechanics of the horse and position play into successful jumping. The most common response involved the advanced rider's ability to influence the horse and teach the horse new concepts and maneuvers.

Most students have many different instructors throughout their riding career. Instructors who have new students come to them who already have had riding instruction in the past will find missing skills. I wanted to know which skills and concepts were most common missing from students coming to a new instructor. There are several reasons why a student may come to a new riding instructor with missing skills: many riders have not had good instruction or any instruction at all, a rider coming from a different discipline may have a different set of basic skills, the horses the student rode may not have been skilled enough to teach them, or teachers may have a different priority of what the basics include. Many instructors in my survey found that students come to them missing the basics of riding and position. This coincided with my literary research in which Jan Dawson states the importance of starting riders off with a strong foundation since each skill builds upon the other. As Dawson said in her article, students are so focused on reaching the next level as quickly as possible that they often miss the basics that will get them there. Patience needs to be taught to students who come in ready to move up through the levels more quickly than they should. Learning true horsemanship takes time and cannot be rushed. Another common theme found in the answers to this

question was use of the body and aids to effectively communicate to the horse. Many teachers will tell their student what to do but do not thoroughly explain why the rider needs to use this specific aid. These riders who do not understand the “why” will not know how to fix issues as they arise because they only know what to do when their instructor tells them to do it. Students not only need to understand the exercise to achieve a skill, but they have to practice that skill many times on many different horses to achieve a solid muscle memory. Each rider must be taught the different effects each aid can have on the horse for them to truly understand how to correctly use their aids and influence their horse.

It can be difficult to begin teaching a student who came from a different background of riding or simply a different teacher because every instructor has a different method of teaching and sometimes students have a difficult time learning from someone who teaches differently. As a follow up question to what missing concepts are often found in incoming students, I wanted to know how the instructors went about introducing these missing concepts to their students. Most instructors said they would take their student back to the basics and move forward from there to make sure that the student had a strong foundation before trying to progress any further. In order to do this, several instructors said they would put the student on the lunge line\* to aid in introducing the basics to the incoming students. In addition to moving the student back to the basics, the teachers also said they would be sure to thoroughly explain the “why” to everything they are asking their students to do by giving plentiful examples and asking many questions to try and gain an understanding of what their student understood and what they were confused about. Several instructors were clear that repetition was key to introducing any

concept to students. There were also a few instructors who felt visual demonstrations were beneficial in showing the student what they want them to do.

The body position, aids, and vocabulary can change drastically among disciplines and when a rider who comes from a different background or style of riding in the past begins riding with a new instructor, it can be difficult to get the student to understand the differences in teaching systems and help them adjust to a new manner of riding or teaching. There has to be a respect for where the student came from while still holding true to your teaching methods and philosophy. How do you teach someone if they have learned a certain way of doing something that is incorrect but they may not see why it is not working? Most instructors were clear that as the new teacher you should never tell the student that their previous instructor was wrong. Some said they would start back at the basics so they could be sure to fill in any gaps in knowledge or skill that the rider had. If the system the rider learned is not necessarily incorrect but does not coincide with how you teach you can try to find similarities and build from there or try to “prove” that your way really does work by demonstrating the results of your system. It can be beneficial to try and understand and explain why the previous teacher taught that certain way and then explain why you teach something differently. A truly effective teacher will take what the rider knows and build around that rather than destroying what the rider already understands.

Depending on the instructor, lessons can be taught privately or in a group. Most instructors have a preference for one or the other and also tend to have strengths and weaknesses that make them more suited for group or private lessons. There is a significant difference between teaching only one person and teaching a group of people.



The style of teaching and the attention needed change. Naturally, focusing on details becomes more difficult when the teacher must split his/her attention between several students, but there are certain advantages to teaching in a group. In a group of students who know how to get the most out of their lesson, each student can learn from the other by watching their peers and their riding mistakes and successes. If students in the lesson listens to what the instructor has to say to the other riders, they can learn more about how to fix problems arising in their own horse. When an instructor teaches privately, there is much more opportunity for focusing on the finer details and hopefully advancing that horse and rider team further in a shorter amount of time. Most instructors in my survey said they taught the two types of lessons differently, though there were a few who said there was not much difference other than time management and that having an assistant to keep the lesson moving along was helpful. The majority of instructors said they planned their private lessons more than they did their group lessons because they can tailor that plan to a specific rider rather than allowing themselves more flexibility to include varying levels and skill sets among students in a group lesson. A significant number of instructors agreed that though certain aspects require some change, they essentially taught the two types of lessons similarly.

Riding can be considered an extreme sport and can definitely be dangerous. Dealing with a thousand pound animal takes confidence, and it would be difficult to find a rider who had not had his/her confidence shaken at some point in his/her riding career. As a student, it is incredibly important to have an instructor who gives you confidence and sets you up for success. Unfortunately, no matter how much riding teachers attempt to facilitate confidence, every student's confidence level varies and every instructor is

going to have to deal with a student who has lost his/her confidence at some point in his/her career. Working with a confidence problem takes patience and empathy. These problems do not go away quickly. It tends to take a while to re-build someone's confidence and there will probably always be a residual part of the issue that never completely goes away. The instructors in my study agreed that the best way to prevent confidence problems was not over-facing the student with something beyond their level and by giving the student a strong foundation so they are prepared to handle different situations without losing control. Nearly every teacher said he/she would change the horse that student was riding to an easier horse or one that did not aggravate the problem the student was having. You must give them back the feeling of control. If changing the horse is not possible, most instructors said they would step the student back a level and make sure he/she was comfortable with that level before trying to progress further. One of responses I felt was particularly interesting was the "sandwich method." In this confidence building method, the instructor "sandwiches" something a student does wrong with two positive actions of a student. This way the student never feels like all he/she hears is negative feedback and the instruction can be heard and understood better. The student knows he/she did something well but he/she can also work on what needs to be fixed. One instructor said the main way she helped students not lose their confidence was by reminding them that they learn through failure. If everything always goes perfectly and you never have any issues, you miss out on learning many valuable lessons and will probably not grow to be as strong of a rider. Challenges help us learn. I thought this was a very interesting and effective manner of giving students confidence within the inevitable problems they will have.

Since I started riding at MTSU I have learned the value of riding as many different horses as possible. Every horse has different physical and emotional characteristics that can help a rider learn how to handle many different situations. Every horse can teach a rider something new. Some instructors only teach students who own their own horses, so they cannot really use different horses to teach their students something new, but many instructors have a number of school horses and can help advance their students by putting them on different horses. Every instructor in my study said they like to put their students on a variety of horses because it not only helps teach them something new, but it helps identify to the instructor and the student if a problem is because of something the horse is doing or if it is because the student is not asking the horse correctly.

No matter what you are doing it is extremely important to set goals. Setting goals gives you somewhere to go and something to work towards. You are much more likely to succeed if you can give yourself attainable goals. I wanted to know how instructors helped their students set goals for themselves. One way that many instructors helped students set goals was through competition. Most of the teachers who participated in my study either have students who compete or want to compete. They said it was easier to set goals with students who compete or want to compete because they have a very clear set end goal from which they can set incremental goals to reach before they show. It proves to be a good way to test a horse and rider because some students can be stars at home yet do not perform well at competitions. Shows can act as a sort of benchmark to see where the student is and what new goals and skills they might need to work on in order to succeed. There are people who have no interest in showing and simply want to ride for

fun. In these cases goal setting may require more time with the student talking to them about where they want to be in a year and how you can get them there. It is definitely a conversation in which both instructor and student should give their thoughts and opinions. The instructor has to listen to what the student wants to do because the student will not progress as quickly if they are not working towards a goal they really want to achieve; however, the teacher can certainly help guide the student if he/she needs help figuring out his/her goals.

As expressed in the thesis statement most successful teachers have developed logical, learnable, progressive, and repeatable systems of teaching riding to his/her incoming students in order to achieve predictable outcomes. One facet of these systems is particular exercises for horse and rider that seem to assist in the student understanding a concept better than just an explanation can. I asked the participants of my survey if they would share their favorite exercises. This question had some of the most varied responses. The use of gymnastic exercises with jumps and poles were mentioned multiple times as well as lunge lessons for beginners and no-stirrup work. There were a few participants who made very specific suggestions for exercises they found particularly useful. One participant gave a description of some skill level tests a teacher can give to figure out what skills a rider possesses and which skills might be missing.

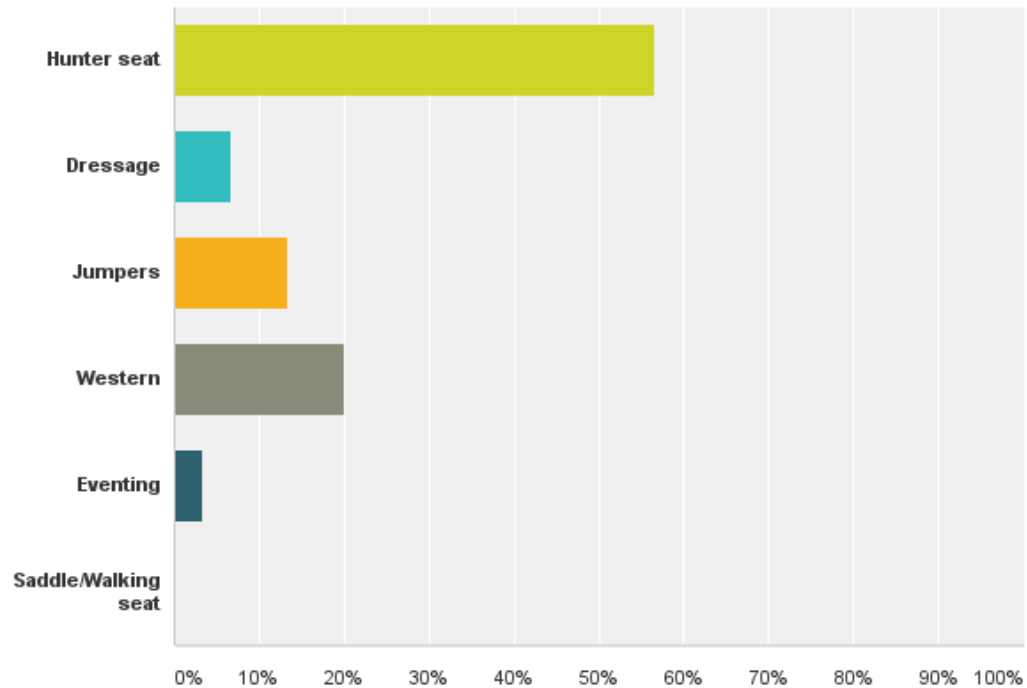
1. Make a perfect circle around a cone at all three gaits and different sizes.
2. Stop and back drill.
3. Straight lines. Drop your hands and aim at a fence post or anything stationary. Send the horse off at a walk without your aid and see how many steps it takes for him to go off your intended line. Don't correct the line. When you feel it, then go 90 degrees the opposite direction. You can do this at the walk and trot.
4. Sidepass. Start by putting the horse's head against a fence and moving back and forth slowly, perpendicular to the fence. When you finish these four drills, the horse and rider will tell you everything you need to know about what skills they possess.

Another participant suggested setting three jumps (or poles) up in a “Y” shape. Rider will jump straight part of the Y and then can bend to either side of the Y practicing “bending lines, counting strides, collection, and extension.” The final unique exercise a teacher suggested was having her students look out over tip the horse’s outside ear. This exercise is meant to help riders stay straight and balanced on their horse and not look too far over their shoulder which will subsequently affect the positioning of the their body. Many riders have a difficult time staying centered and straight on their horse so I really thought this simple exercise would be helpful to students.

Teachers can learn a great amount from their students. I tried to integrate the importance of the student’s opinion in the design of this study by surveying students as well as teachers. In this manner I was able to see if there were similarities in how the instructors viewed teaching and how the students received the instruction. In this survey for students with over two years riding experience I asked similar questions to the ones in the teacher survey, but it included more information on how they learned best. I started by getting their background in riding.

### Q3 What style of riding have you taken lessons in?

Answered: 30 Skipped: 12



**Figure 1. Styles of riding represented among students.**

Hunter seat was the majority discipline, but it was interesting to see the variety in responses. The differences show how students tend to try a variety of disciplines which will help them become better, well-rounded riders.

#### Q4 What do you think is the most difficult aspect of learning how to ride?

Answered: 31 Skipped: 11

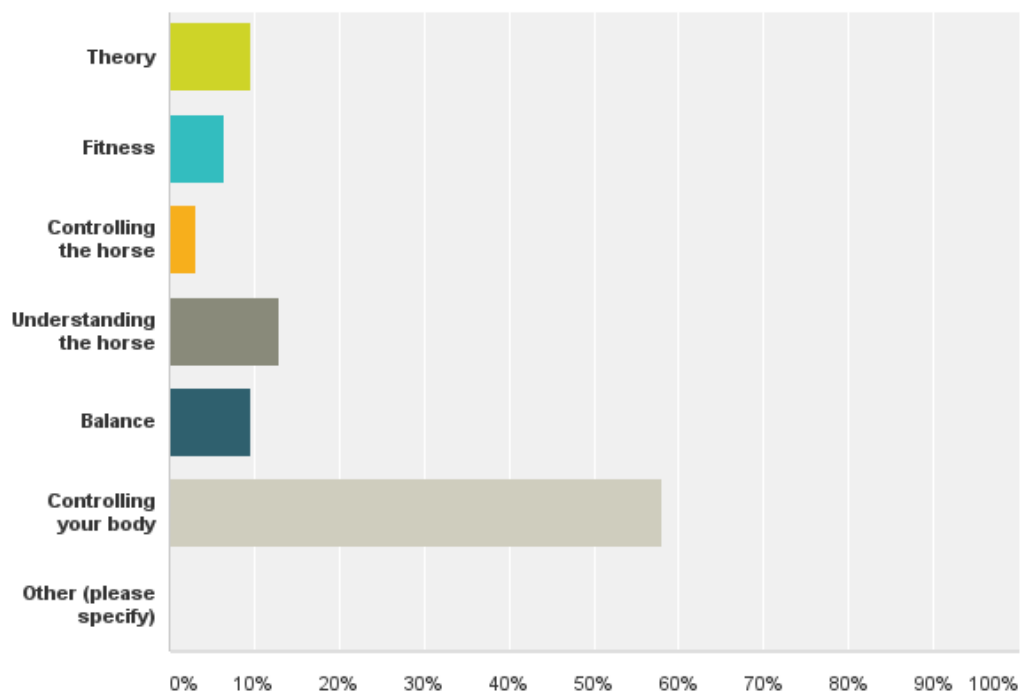
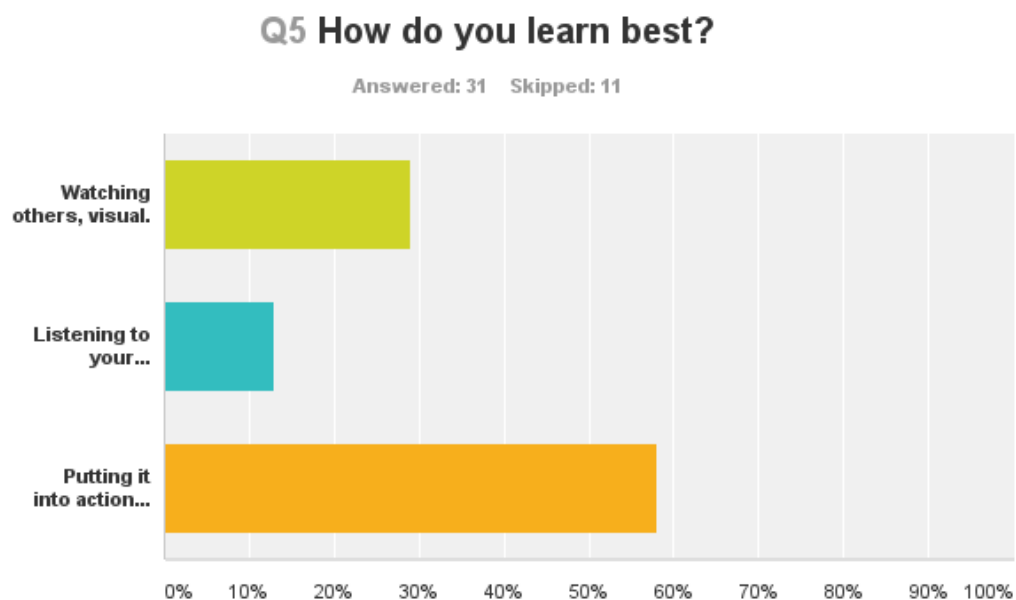


Figure 2. Most difficult aspect of learning how to ride.

Every student comes with certain expectations; some will be proven to be true and others false. I really wanted to know what students thought was the most difficult aspect of learning how to ride. I was very interested in the results. I would have expected “understanding the horse” to be a higher percentage than it was. Controlling your body can be a mental and physical problem. You may be missing the strength or flexibility or hand-eye coordination to effectively control your body or you just cannot figure how to

put your hand in one position and your leg in the opposite even when you have no physical limitations, you simply cannot get your brain on board with your body.



**Figure 3. Visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learners.**

These results did not surprise me. Riding effectively is the ability to “feel” and react more than anything else. Most students I know learn more quickly if they can see a video of them riding or watch another person successfully ride a maneuver than by just listening to their instructor explain through words. Riding and learning is also all about repetition which means putting it into action is the only way you will really be able to master an exercise or concept. The majority of student participants felt the intellectual side of riding was very important and that having a teacher who would explain the “why” of riding was much more effective than a teacher who did not.



I was interested to find a definite trend in responses from students on what were the most effective or ineffective teaching methods they had experienced in their riding career. A large number of students mentioned that understanding the “why” first was extremely effective in their progression when they rode. Another large number of students had experienced instructors who yelled frequently without really giving them a solution. Each of these students felt like the yelling had no benefit to their learning.

Having struggled with confidence issues in the past, I wanted to see what other students had experienced in this area and how they had gotten over their confidence problems. All but one student admitted they had struggled with confidence problems in the past. The reoccurring themes in how to move past these issues were having a positive trainer, ending your ride on a good note, and moving back to something you feel comfortable with and then trying to move forward when ready. The answers between the riders and instructors on this question were very similar. The students did not mention changing horses to an easier, more confident building horse which many of the instructors did suggest, but the other ideas were the same.

I also asked the students if they could identify the differences between a beginner, intermediate, and advanced rider. A few students strictly correlated a rider’s level to how high he/she was jumping or at what level he/she was showing and some students based it strictly on how many years a student has ridden. Most of the participants felt that the differences were more about how much the rider could influence the horse and control his/her body and aids. A good percentage of the answers came in line with the responses from instructors. Both mentioned beginners only having basic steering and control at the walk, trot, and canter with little to no influence over how the horse moved. Students

concurred with the instructors that the qualities of an intermediate rider included an understanding of how to influence a horse and the skills to do so with a more experienced horse. They have much more control of their body and can apply their aids with correct timing to ask the horse to do something. Students also suggested an advanced rider understands the theories behind riding and can execute them well. These riders have a sophisticated seat, leg, and hand and they have the ability to influence a horse's way of movement greatly. They can also influence and teach uneducated or "green" horses.

When I asked the students if they used events/competition/games to help learn/advance their riding skills almost every student said yes. The only one who said they did not like competitions and other events said it was because they simply did not have a competitive nature. Every other student felt like competition was important in helping them set goals and have something to progress towards. They also said it was important for trying new things and getting another person's (judge) perspective. Much like the instructors, the majority of the students felt like competition was helpful in setting clear goals. Many of the students said that the most important goals they set were the daily ones. These are the goals that they establish each time they ride a particular horse where they can set an achievable objective for that day that will hopefully help them progress toward their bigger overall goal.

The third survey I did was geared towards students who had ridden for two years or less. There were not as many meaningful questions I could ask this group of participants because of their lack of experience and time in the saddle. There were also fewer responses, only seven students took part in this survey. Only two disciplines were represented in this group of riders: hunter seat and eventing. Eighty percent of the

students came from a hunter seat background. One hundred percent of the students said they found they learned best kinesthetically. This was interesting because there was more variety in the students who had been riding for more than two years. Part of the difference could be the number of participants as I had a much larger number of students respond to the survey for more experienced riders. I do think that beginner students can benefit greatly from watching a more experienced rider execute a certain maneuver or pattern, but they have to practice with frequent repetition in order to master a skill and gain muscle memory. These students have not spent very many hours in the saddle so my most significant question with them was what they believed would be the most difficult aspect of learning how to ride. Every student had a different expectation. One student thought learning how to release pressure at the right time would be difficult, giving the commands at the right time in the right way was mentioned, along with gaining a more independent seat. As it is with any sport, frequent repetition and practice help one learn and progress faster. One student made a comment that it was difficult to learn things because she only rode once a week. Unfortunately, not everyone has the opportunity to ride more than once a week and that is a shame. It will be much harder to progress without regular time spent in the saddle by yourself and also time spent under the watchful eye of an instructor.

### **Conclusions**

This study on the most effective teaching methods that produce competitive success for equestrians proved to be a fascinating project that yielded both interesting and extremely useful results. I have been attending MTSU for the past four years with the hopes of earning a degree in Horse Science to help prepare me to be a riding instructor.

This study was especially significant for me because I will use the information I have learned from surveying so many successful riding instructors when I begin teaching after graduation. The knowledge I have gained from the survey responses will hopefully help me become a more effective teacher for my students. This study will also be useful to other instructors as there were a number of participating teachers who said they would be very interested in learning the results of the study once it had finished. One participant even thought the study contained very interesting information for a book she wanted to write. Overall, the responses I received for the study were overwhelmingly positive about how this research could be useful for many people. The results were varied but within the instructor responses there were many similarities in how each instructor would handle specific issues that are bound to arise among students. The student responses had more variation but a trend could still be found in their answers as well. The answers seemed to get more varied as the experience level decreased. The instructors were mostly on the same page and as the number of years of riding experience got lower, the responses became more divergent. Some of the most useful responses I received were the ones that gave specific exercises to help fix specific issues such as ride a perfect circle at all three gaits, sidepass down the rail, ride a straight line, look over the horse's outside ear, jump a "Y" shaped line of fences etc. The other set of responses that I found to be extremely interesting and useful were the ones that talked about how they help build a strong foundation for their students and introduce any missing skills and concepts. The answers were very similar in for this question. Every instructor realized this could be a difficult issue to face as it is extremely important to respect where the student came from. Each instructor really stressed the importance of bringing the student back to the basics and

creating that foundation before progressing any further. From that point goal setting becomes extremely important so the instructor and student have somewhere to progress to. I learned from both the student and instructor surveys that the goal setting process must involve the instructor and student. This is not something that can be done well by just one person. The use of multi-sensory teaching also stood out in my survey. Every student learns differently and it is important for the instructor to use visual, auditory, and kinesthetic teaching methods to teach each student most effectively. Another trend that was found through this study was the need for students to ride as many horses as possible. Each horse offers a student the opportunity to learn something new. A rider who has ridden many horses can take the skills he/she learned from each horse and put them in his/her toolbox for later use on any horse. I will use information from all the questions in my survey, but these were some of the most helpful ones I encountered. There is certainly more that could be done with this study to receive more in depth and useful information. My hope is that this study can be the groundwork for both students and instructors to learn how to effectively work together to reach success in their riding and teaching careers.

### Bibliography

“Hunter Jumper Connection,” last modified April 2014.

<http://www.hunterjumperconnection.com/>

Jan Dawson, “Teaching Beginners to Ride,” *Caution: Horses*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (1996).

Accessed September 21, 2014.

<https://asci.uvm.edu/equine/law/articles/beginners.htm>

Eckart Meyners, *Effective Teaching and Riding: Exploring Balance and Motion*

(Montana: Goals Unlimited Press, 2004,) 15-144.

Jill Hassler-Scoop, *Equestrian Education: Professional Development for Instructors*

(Montana: Goals Unlimited Press, 2002,) 87-90.

## Appendix



4/8/2015

Investigator(s): Layne Sanders and Anne Brzezicki  
Department: Horse Science  
Investigator(s) Email: las6i@mtmail.mtsu.edu; abrzezick@bellsouth.net

Protocol Title: "Riding toward success: A study of teaching methods that consistently produce competitive success for equestrians "

Protocol Number: 15-257

Dear Investigator(s),

The MTSU Institutional Review Board, or a representative of the IRB, has reviewed the research proposal identified above. The MTSU IRB or its representative has determined that the study poses minimal risk to participants and qualifies for an expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110, and you have satisfactorily addressed all of the points brought up during the review.

Approval is granted for one (1) year from the date of this letter for 100 (ONE HUNDRED) participants.

Please note that any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918. Any change to the protocol must be submitted to the IRB before implementing this change.

You will need to submit an end-of-project form to the Office of Compliance upon completion of your research located on the IRB website. Complete research means that you have finished collecting and analyzing data. **Should you not finish your research within the one (1) year period, you must submit a Progress Report and request a continuation prior to the expiration date.** Please allow time for review and requested revisions. Failure to submit a Progress Report and request for continuation will automatically result in cancellation of your research study. Therefore, you will not be able to use any data and/or collect any data. Your study expires **4/8/2016**.

According to MTSU Policy, a researcher is defined as anyone who works with data or has contact with participants. Anyone meeting this definition needs to be listed on the protocol and needs to complete the required training. **If you add researchers to an approved project, please forward an updated list of researchers to the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.**

All research materials must be retained by the PI or faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) for at least three (3) years after study completion and then destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board  
Middle Tennessee State University