

Transitions



I stay upright in correct alignment and body position to support Donner Girl in a balanced halt from walk. To accomplish this transition, I use an exhale breath to engage my core muscles and stop my pelvis from moving with DG's back. My rein aid is simply a cessation of staying with her undulating neck at walk. She "hears" these changes and responds with a balanced halt. Use of an exhale breath as the foundation of every restraining aid (as if your body says, "I'm not going forward anymore") allows precision and tact in your restraining rein aids.

Upward Transitions

In all transitions, you must stay balanced—despite the change in your horse's energy—and move appropriately with the ensuing gait. In up transitions, the energy increases. To ride a balanced up transition, anticipate the increased forward energy and avoid being left behind. Establish a proactive mindset, self-carriage from core balance, and a "come with me" intent to encourage the increased energy from your horse. Your leg aids provide the final cues for the up transitions; be ready to move in the rhythm of the new gait.

Downward Transitions

Just as in the up transitions, maintaining balance is key for a good quality down transition. Without preparation, a down transition can cause you to fall forward. Most downward transitions result in less forward energy. Use your core muscles to prepare your body for that decreased energy. I think

of the front of the body functioning like a wall that tells the horse, “I’m not going forward so much anymore, and neither should you.” Basing the down transitions with the intent of your body, supported by your core muscles, assists your balance and prevents an abrupt restricting rein aid. As in the up transition, be prepared to move in the rhythm of the new gait.

Walk-to-Halt or Trot-to-Halt Transition

Consider what happens when going from either walk or trot to halt. You go from moving with your horse as appropriate for the given gait to not moving at all. That is the basis of your halt aid. Stop moving. Breathe to facilitate this transition. For walk to halt, note that your arms and legs are moving with your horse, and your pelvis moves somewhat too. Take an inhale breath, and as you exhale, firm up your core muscles to stabilize your pelvis and anchor your arms by your sides. You needn’t pull back to accomplish this transition: simply stop your movement.

The same strategy will work for trot to halt. Your horse will quickly learn this aid. Done this way, the halt aid happens without pulling and promotes balance and harmony. You appear as if you’ve done “nothing.” But in fact, you’ve ridden the transition in a thoughtful, organized, balanced, and logical manner. This makes it look easy.

Trot to walk transition

Focus on the change of rhythm that happens when going from trot to walk. As you do with other transitions, use your breath to organize and center, and then add a bit more tone to give that “don’t go forward so much” message to your horse. Be prepared to soften your aid as soon as your horse walks so you do not lose energy. Often this transition results in a loss of forward energy—your horse abruptly plops himself on his forelegs and then needs to reorganize into the walk.

It may take many trot steps to accomplish the walk transition at first. But over time, your horse will learn the “don’t go forward so much” cue from your body stability and breathing, and quickly come to a prompt, balanced, and active walk. The transition comes from managing your horse’s energy from your center and steadying—not pulling on—the reins. This promotes balance and harmony between you and your horse.

