

Trail Riding Etiquette

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Etiquette and safety are close relatives that share a proportional relationship. In many cases a lack of one creates a breach of the other. Poor etiquette typically leads to unsafe activities, while excellent etiquette paves the road for safe riding experiences.

To keep riders in your party safe you should at a minimum:

- Nominate a leader/trail boss
- Ride at the level/speed of the least experienced rider
- Ask the group (and get consent) before increasing speed
- Communicate concerns clearly
- Maintain 10 feet or more between horses
- The lead rider should notify others of danger; each following rider should pass the message along
- Carry a cell phone on your body (not on your horse)
- Carry a trail map
- Pack a [first aid kit](#)
- Require all youth to wear ASTM/SEI approved helmets, and even if helmets aren't required for adults, recommend that they be worn by all riders anyway (helmets should be replaced after every fall)
- Always return to the trailer/barn at a walk



Make sure that your horse is ready to trail ride. Horses need to build their muscle strength and endurance gradually, just like humans. It is really important to condition and desensitize your horse well in advance of a trail ride. This takes time and commitment. [Conditioning rides](#) should be conducted over similar terrain (i.e. riding up hills regularly in advance of a hilly ride) and in well fitted tack. Arena riding generally is not adequate conditioning for trail riding.

Proper hoof care is vitally important to the soundness of horses used for all riding. Many horses are most comfortable trail riding with shoes (or specialty boots) and you should discuss the best option for your horse's hoof care with your farrier.

Other considerations for your horse's well being while trail riding:

- Allow your horse the opportunity to drink at every water crossing
- Check your tack regularly for proper fit
- Examine feet and legs carefully after riding
- Pick feet before and after every ride
- Groom or wash your horse before and after every ride

LAS VAQUERAS WOMENS RIDING CLUB – Some Trail Etiquette Guidelines

In the horseback riding world there are universal etiquette practices and specific etiquette for a variety of situations. Often we don't think of trail etiquette immediately since trail riding is often a recreational activity without the formalities of "ring riding" or competition. However understanding and practicing good trail behavior is advisable.

Part of good trail etiquette is ensuring that you are respectful of trails and land areas which begins with your arrival at the trail head. Ways to become a better land steward include:

- Park only in designated areas
- Keep your muck in the trailer and dispose of it at home or in a designated area
- Tie only to your trailer, designated tie areas, or using a safe high tie (do NOT tie directly to trees)
- Keep your horse moving while he/she passes manure on the trail
- Take out everything that you bring in (pack it in, pack it out)
- Stay on the trail – do not create pass arounds to avoid areas
- Only enter waterways at designated crossings
- Avoid muddy trails – if you have to pass through mud - WALK
- Obey all signage – do not ride in non-horse areas
- Abide by all voluntary trail closures
- Collect muck and scattered hay from your tie site and dispose of it at home or in a designated area
- Fill in any uneven areas created by you or your horse
- Follow the leave no trace ethics (more information at www.lnt.org.)

Courtesy is another important part of enjoying the great outdoors on horseback. Many trails are open to multi users and it is important that we communicate with others in a productive manner. When you encounter users on the trail you can make that meeting a positive experience by:

- Talking to them
- Asking them to step off the downhill side of the trail while you pass
- Sharing the number of riders in your group and asking them how many are with them
- Desensitizing your horse at home

You should be courteous to other members in your riding party by:

- Waiting for gate openers/closers
- Waiting for all horses to drink before leaving a watering area
- Moving downstream to allow other horses ample room to drink
- Waiting for riders when they have dismounted or are off for any reason
- Not running up behind or alongside other riders
- Passing on the left
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If your horse exhibits behaviors which require special consideration you should tell all the members of the riding party about those issues and place a ribbon of appropriate color both in your horse's tail and mane. The following are common ribbon color codes:

- Red = Kick
- Green = Novice
- Blue = Stallion

Remember to keep an eye on safety, obey land stewardship rules, be courteous, and wear all the right ribbons to have an enjoyable ride every time.

30 Tips for Better Trail Riding



Improve your trail rides with our best collection of tips.

1. Desensitize your horse to scary situations you may encounter on the trail in a safe environment, such as an arena.
2. Gradually introduce him to traffic where you can control the situation.
3. Before you even think of hitting the trail, you and your horse should have mastery of basic skills in the arena. You should have whoa and go, steering, and control at all gaits.
4. If your horse isn't used to riding alone, build up his confidence by going out for short jaunts frequently, working up to longer rides as his confidence grows.
5. Don't tailgate! Maintain one horse length between horses.
6. Before you trot or canter on the trail, check with the other riders in your group.
7. In a mixed-levels group ride, put an experienced rider in the lead and another at the end.
8. If your group is well matched in skill level, take turns riding in the lead, middle and end positions.
9. Negotiate road crossings as a group so that no horse is left behind on the other side of a busy roadway.
10. Horses feel safest in a herd, and some may panic if they feel deserted. It's best to keep all riders in your group together, although experienced horses and riders may be fine venturing off alone.
11. At water stops, wait until all horses are done drinking before leaving the watering place. Some horses won't drink if they are distracted by the fear of being left behind.
12. If your horse tries to hurry home, refocus his attention by asking him to ride in serpentines along the trail, or flex to give his shoulder.
13. Rather than pulling straight back on the reins when your horse dives for a bite of grass along the trail, try pulling him left or right while you encourage him to move out.
14. Mind your multi-use manners: Show courtesy to hikers, bikers and others sharing the trail. You are an ambassador for equestrians!
15. If you crave competition, consider participating in a judged trail ride (trail trial), endurance ride or competitive trail ride.
16. Looking for adventure with your friends or family? Some camping facilities, state and national parks offer amenities to accommodate horses, including corrals.
17. Approach slippery, slick or rocky trail conditions slowly. Keep yourself centered in the saddle, so you don't throw your horse off balance.
18. Clean up after yourself: If you parked your rig at a trailhead, don't leave piles of manure and other mess behind.
19. Save our trails—join the Equestrian Land Conservation Resource to work for land access and preservation on a local or national level. www.elcr.org
20. Wear a helmet with an extended visor for added sun protection.
21. Be seen: If you ride out at night, reflective tack and clothing is a must. Wear dayglo orange in hunting territory.
22. Keep your tack in good repair. You don't want a cinch or bridle to break out on the trail.

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23. If you only trail ride on the weekends, make sure the ride you choose is within your horse's current fitness level.
24. When you set out, always let someone know where you are going and when you expect to be back.
25. Carry a cell phone on your body, rather than in a saddlebag, in the event that you and your horse part company. Attach an ID tag somewhere on your horse's gear as well.
26. Pack a basic [first-aid kit for horses and humans](#).
27. Don't let your horse choose to charge up hills—a change in pace should be decided by you.
28. Reevaluate your horse's saddle fit on trail. A good arena saddle doesn't always make a good trail saddle.
29. If you use protective legwear for your horse, make sure it can withstand the rigors of trail riding. You shouldn't come home with burrs and/or sand in your horse's boots or wraps.
30. Insect populations can increase on the trails. [Protect yourself and your horse from pests, including gnats and ticks](#).

Mind Your Trail Manners *By Audrey Pavia*



A trail ride with friends is one of the most relaxing activities you can do on horseback. But that is only if you and your friends observe good trail manners while you are out and about.

Following good trail manners is vital to having a safe, fun and relaxing ride. Riders who ignore or are not aware of the rules of trail etiquette not only jeopardize the safety of other riders, but also become unpopular trail partners.

Here is a list of basic trail manners and the reasons they are important:

- Keep at least one horse's length between you and the horse in front of you. Many horses don't appreciate having another horse's nose in their rump, and some will kick in retaliation. Staying one length back keeps horses safe and happy.
- Don't trot or gallop past another rider. Horses have a strong herd instinct, and if you speed past the horse in front of you, odds are that horse is going to bolt and take off after you in an attempt to keep up. Slow to a walk when passing other trail users. Also, ask fellow trail riders if they want to trot or canter before doing so.
- Don't leave a water source until all the horses are finished drinking. The equine herd instinct dictates that when one horse leaves the drinking area, the other horses follow. In trail riding situations, it's vital that horses drink all the water they can, especially if the weather is hot. Don't disturb another horse's drink by leaving the water before he's finished.

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- Make sure you have complete control of your horse before you go out on a trail ride. If you have a nervous, hard-to-handle horse, learn how to control him before you expose him to other horses. A spooky horse often spreads his anxiety to other horses on the ride.
- On multi-use trails livestock traditionally have the right of way, but don't assume that this is always the case. Courtesy, common sense and good judgment are essential to safely sharing the trail. Use care approaching hikers or bikers—and remember they may not be familiar with horses. If there's any doubt, communicate to them about the safest way to pass, and be friendly and considerate.
- As a final note, always thank a fellow trail user who yields the right of way. Many of our trail systems are multi use/purpose and courtesy is always best.
- Some of the above may be repetitive only because they are importantly valid.

HAPPY TRAILS!