# Horse handling and training series

## Part 3: Rider position – Summary

Similar to any athletic discipline, the relative ease of an accomplished skill must be maintained through continued effort. Horses do not naturally possess the strength, straightness, and suppleness to be able to travel in consistent engagement. These are trained characteristics of horses that require ongoing training to achieve, as well as support and appropriate riding and direction from the rider. Therefore, the rider must train their body to able to educate the energies of an uneducated horse. Training the body to become a more athletic rider is an important welfare consideration for the rider, as an improved athletic ability will allow for more effective and compassionate training of the horse.

### Body position

The body must be in the centre of the crucifix or the centre of the horse. The heels should be in line with hip or just in front of the hip, and the body position through the waist can be in the neutral position (sitting straight up), leaning back onto your pockets, or leaning slightly forwards. The rider’s hands should be in the athletic position. The exact position depends on the individual horse and its level of education, as well as the exercise.

### Flexion with one rein

Flexion with one rein is a simple exercise used to train a horse to flex each way in varying amounts depending on the horse’s education. The exercise improves the horse’s suppleness and balance and also makes the horse softer and more responsive to ride. It is important that the rider has their hands and body in the correct position at all times when riding to ensure the horse gets accurate direction and instruction.

To achieve flexion with one rein, the direction rein slides down the rein towards the horse’s mouth until the tip of the horse’s nose starts to move around. The rider’s hand comes out and around, halfway between the rider’s knee and hip. The outside rein comes forward so that it is not pulling on the outside rein. The horse’s nose should not come back past the point of the horse’s shoulder.

### Horse flexion positions 1 to 5

To assist with learning, flexion positions have been numbered from 1 to 5. Position 1 is when the horse has its head flexed around the direction that you are going (or to the inside) to the point of the shoulder. This is the most flexion a handler should ask a horse to have. Position 3 is the neutral position, when the horse’s neck is straight. Position 5 is when the horse’s head is flexed around to the outside to the point of the shoulder. Positions 2 and 4 are between 1 and 3 and 3 and 5 respectively, where the horse has some flexion, but not all the way around to the point of the shoulder.

Position 1 is dependent on which direction the rider is going or will be going. Position 1 is always to the inside, so if the rider changes direction from left to right, position 1 does not stay on the left side; it would move to the right side once the rider is going to the right. This is an important aspect to properly understand the positions of flexion.

### Riding: Positions 1 to 5

Through the use of flexion positions 1 to 5, the rider is trying to achieve lateral and vertical flexion. To begin, the rider goes back to a one rein flexion position, slides the hand down the rein until the horse’s nose starts to move around, and then flexes the horse’s head around to the point of the shoulder. This is position 1. The brake rein is then dropped under the neck muscle and the slack taken up on this rein to achieve vertical flexion. Continue to have contact on the direction and brake rein to have vertical and lateral flexion and move the horse’s head from position 1 to position 2, to position 3 (neutral), then positions 4 and 5 (outside flexion). Then we can move the horse’s head back around through the positions.

The aim of using the flexion positions 1 to 5 is to increase the horse’s ability to flex to different degrees, as well as improve the horse’s balance, responsiveness, suppleness, and overall performance when being ridden. Establishing flexion is the foundation for many more advanced exercises and is a fundamental to a well-educated horse.

The difference between one rein flexion and flexion using the 1 to 5 positions is that one rein flexion only uses one rein and therefore only achieves lateral flexion. Flexion of the 1 to 5 positions requires lateral and vertical flexion, meaning that the horse’s head is also flexed slightly downwards and both reins are used.