

THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF
A HORSE'S WARMUP

By Chris Adderson



How To Evaluate Flowing And
Stuck Movement With Purpose,
Strategy, Power And EASE
In Your Horse's Warm Up

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Wouldn't it feel amazing to be a member of a horse-rider team where both participants give willingly and consistently, resulting in a crescendo of exciting progress?

...to see your horses thriving and enjoying their interactions with you every day (even waiting at the gate for you)?

... to collaborate with your horse in an authentic, integrous way that feels harmonious to you (versus an "obedience" session)?

...to joyfully dance together, consistently developing more sensitivity, nuance, fluidity, and flow?

Now, would you be intrigued to hear how you could create all this with a simple 10-minute (or less) process?

Hi, I'm Chris Adderson.

I'm a world-renowned equine clinician and a former professional dancer. I have developed a truly innovative program using my knowledge of how a dancer prepares so that she can move fluidly, the importance of mindset, and the essentials of classical dressage and natural horsemanship.



My experiences and training enable me to guide you in developing a truly effective horse-rider team.

And now, I want to share with you one part of how it's done, using a technique called...

The Strategic Warmup

Clear, inviting, and receptive communication is the key to developing and training a horse.

The best way to do that?

Invite reciprocity, starting with a clear mental image of what you are undertaking, then putting that movement into your own body (**embodying** the request), and finally inviting your horse to join you in movement.

Approaching your horse this way evokes curiosity, encourages connection, cultivates conversation, and inspires consistency.

The warmup sets the tone for a session, ensuring that it meets the criteria above and will open the door and deepen the dialogue with your horse.

Here, I will share with you a simple strategic warmup that I use with my own horses and teach students in my program. This simple, 3-step process will purposely connect your spine to your horse's spine, allowing you both to warm up with sensitivity, poise, and assurance.





First, let me tell you my story.

It was 1997. I had just purchased the horse of my dreams, an Andalusian gelding, Me Llamo Conquistador.

He soon after got an injury as a youngster, which started my journey of building a broken horse into a stunning athlete.

Though I was very successful, having developed a high-level classical dressage horse who was a willing and forever-giving partner using the strategy I want to share with you here, that success didn't come immediately.

We struggled mightily for many years as we tried to overcome a horse who was injured, lame, and then not very athletic at best.

We didn't achieve success until we took the many pieces of the dressage-in-partnership puzzle and drew them together into a process that allowed us to ride together effortlessly and beautifully perform very difficult movements with ease.

If you've ever struggled with a horse, then you probably know how disheartening it can be to see others succeed while you're still struggling.

It doesn't have to be this way, though!

Below, I will share with you my secrets of riding effectively with confidence, poise, and ease, which I wish we had known when my new horse and I started in 1997.

But first, let me recount a true story of a lesson that forever changed the way I looked at riding and contains clues about what most programs and riders get wrong.

Have you ever been taught a lesson *like this*...?

Picture this...

Many years ago, my Morgan mare and I went for a riding lesson with two coaches who worked together. They had different specialties, so I thought they could help my anxious and nervous horse and me move forward together.

I was hopeful. Trusting. Optimistic.

The first coach led me through a warmup, which consisted of doing what I was told to do, one thing after another.

First walk, then trot, then canter.

I was obedient, but inside I thought, "My poor horse!".

My horse constantly chomped on the bit, rushed, unbalanced, and nervous and anxious. It just got worse and worse throughout this coach's portion of the lesson.

Then, during the second half of my lesson with her partner coach, I was told, "We're going to sculpt you in the saddle."

She physically put my legs where they were 'supposed' to be on the saddle, then moved my back to where she wanted it, and then my arms and hands were put into the place that looked good to her...and I was to hold that position while I rode.

Again, my horse was telling me that she was uncomfortable. Eventually, she started to spin in circles.

We hauled out of there as quickly as we could, even though we were invited to watch another lesson.

Here are a few takeaways from this experience:

1. **No one likes to have an obedience session, including horses.** Pushy, aggressive, discordant techniques and approaches turn riders and horses off
2. **There's no 'cookie cutter' rider or horse position** that is effective. Our actual need to find balance and harmony together was never addressed: our needs were not even enquired about. Neither my horse nor I were treated like individuals, much less guided to work together as a pair
3. **The lesson didn't create ANY curiosity or desire.** There was nothing about that warmup that made me (or my horse) want to ask more questions. We both felt less comfortable and confident over the course of the lesson and had no desire to learn more.

And yet, this is EXACTLY how most riders and horses take lessons.

The rider engages with instructors with their own motives or methods, but too often, no consideration is given to the rider's questions, desires, needs, or their horse's background, wants, needs, pains, or desires.

So, how do you effectively warm up your horse?

Well, as I mentioned earlier, the best way to effectively warm up with your horse—without completely missing the point like those two coaches—is by using...

The Strategic Warmup.

This 3-step purposeful, slow, and strategic warmup can be used to check in with your horse's current mental and physical state, assess your horse's physical abilities after a long break, rehabilitate a horse after injury, develop young horses, and extend soundness in elderly horses.

Any horse and rider can benefit!

And as you might have guessed, there is a right way and a wrong way of doing it.

Much like my encounter with the two coaches, the warmup can turn off minds and bodies.

But when done well, warmup can be your open door to dialogue on every level with your horse.

Please don't take details of this warmup lightly because...

Our horses need us to learn this.

It's a courageous world out there.

I see three types of reactions from riders to this approach:

1. "It's a waste of time and so simple."

These riders usually spend 20 minutes or more warming up, following a formula of activities, because that's what they've always done ...

Then they proceed into their ride, with a horse that is little better in mind and movement than before they warmed up.

So, they're left thinking that learning a new approach to warming up is a waste of time, and that my approach is too simple.

I get it!

Before I put the puzzle pieces together, warming up my horse was a stab in the dark.

But the idea that results are too hard to achieve because it's simple, couldn't be further from the truth, as you'll soon see.

2. "How do I know my horse is warmed up enough?"

These riders are obedient learners who just do what they are told to do by experts whom they hope know best...

They work diligently, without focusing on themselves and their own movement or going genuinely deeper.

Like the first group, they may get frustrated and consider quitting completely.

Our last group, in contrast, has discovered that...

3. “Warming up strategically provides a WIDE-open door.”

These are riders who have clear goals for their warmup AND can problem-solve as issues arise rather than being coach-dependent.

These riders are building consistent results with their willing partners.

So, what are the missing puzzle pieces this third group has found that the other groups lack?

Here's the key...

The successful group knows how to move in a clear, inviting, and receptive way with their horses and how to assist them in improving their movement.

This is the essence of **The Strategic Warmup!**

You simply can't beat an inviting warmup for creating feedback and dialogue resulting in a horse who is interested in their work with you.

The DO's and DON'Ts of a Horse Warmup

I know the idea of creating your own warmup can be overwhelming...

Because I've been there.

Luckily for you, though, I've put in my time, done the research, and put the puzzle pieces together of how to create an effective strategic warmup without boredom.

Now, I want to share with you exactly what I've learned. But before we discuss what you should do, let's discuss what NOT to do when warming up your horse.

THE TOP 4 DON'TS OF A HORSE'S WARMUP

You might be tempted, since you've seen it done like this before, to make a lengthy, all-encompassing warmup.

Don't do that.

That is tiring and wearing.

The key to effective warmup is...

Specificity!

The more specific you are for your unique horse...

The more you can be crystal clear on what to spend time on.

The more you can have a fresh, willing horse to work with.

The more your horse will be curious to find out what is next.

The more your horse will want to engage in a conversation with you.

"So, how do I avoid doing too much?"

1. **Don't drill your horse.**
2. **Don't just go forward.**
3. **Don't lose focus.**
4. **Don't forget about you, the rider.**

THE TOP 4 DO'S OF HORSE'S WARMUP

Effective warmup causes curiosity, encourages connection, cultivates conversation, and inspires consistency.

Let's go through each...

1. Cause CURIOSITY

When horses are curious, they are engaged and receptive to the warmup.

They will actually start to look forward to the warmup because they learn that it feels good.

2. Encourage CONNECTION

Your warmup with your horse is a chance to connect on a deeper level. You can help your horse feel ore comfortable, physically and emotionally.

By doing so, you are encouraging partnership and communion right from the very beginning of your session together.

3. Cultivate CONVERSATION

You've got your horse connecting with you now. Your horse knows that you are listening and that it feels good, so they want more.

Your horse asks you questions like...

- "Can you help me with this part of my body today?"
- "Can we stay a bit longer in that area?"

Now, you can lead your horse further along the warmup process.

You are in a dialogue with your horse.

You remain trustworthy. Your relationship grows.

4. Inspire **CONSISTENCY**

You remain consistent with your warmup, with no surprises. Horses don't like surprises.

And by remaining consistent, you show commitment to your horse. Commitment builds trust.

You'll start to be respected by your horse.

Ultimately, you'll become a partner.

So, let's get started!

3 Steps To The Horse Strategic Warmup

You're ready to warmup your horse with strategy, purpose, power and ease...

First, start by observing and feeling into your horse's walk while putting your hands on your horse.

1. COMING THROUGH WALK – initial assessment



Purpose: To increase awareness of how your horse is today and begin the evaluation process.

- ? **Why:** Become aware of potential problems, promote connection, and develop focus (mental and physical).
- ◆ **How:** Walk next to your horse in a straight line. First, focus on your own walk. Become balanced and rhythmic by centering and aligning your spine. Then, without disrupting your own balance or that of your horse, take contact with your horse's body with each of your hands. The easiest way is to gently use one hand to take contact on the noseband of the halter and gently place the other hand at the back of the cheek. Join your horse in the walk.

Look and feel for these:

- Straightness of your path – can you both walk in a straight line, or is there drifting happening? Where is the drift to and away from?
 - Position of the ribcage – which side of the horse is the ribcage swung towards and away from?
 - Closed / tight joints – are there any closed joints or braced spots that you can observe or feel?
 - Striding limbs – are there any shorter striding limbs that you can observe or feel?
-
- **Stuck:** rushing walk or slow, lethargic walk, always drifting in one direction, heavy in your hands.
 - 😊 **Flowing:** feels easy under your hands, clear straight lines, focus on handler.

Now you have an idea of your horse's state at the start of the warmup session. You will use this as a metric for comparison and contrast, as you proceed.

2. EVALUATION OF THE HORSE'S SPINE (AND LIMB ATTACHMENTS)

In the second part of this warmup, we will evaluate the biotensegrity (degree of relaxation or tension) of tissues around the spine, addressing three critical areas and identifying any stuck or braced points, as well as any places that are overly mobile or unstable. We will then formulate a resolution for these problematic areas.

Doing so will not only help the horse move with better alignment, rhythm, straightness, and range of motion but also amplify your communication with your horse and provide context for your subsequent training session.

The 3 critical areas to assess are the poll (where the head connects to the spine), the thorax (where the forelimbs connect to the body and where the saddle sits), and the pelvis/sacrum region (where the hind limbs connect to the spine).

The Poll

(atlanto-occipital joint, and associated areas such as wing of the atlas, masseter, and paritodaicularis)



Purpose: Isolate the joint and assess its unique movement.



Why: Evaluate the degree of mobility and tension in this critical joint that is highly protected by the nervous system. Restricted mobility here will interfere with spinal alignment, lateral bend, and functional, quality movement.



How: Place one hand on your horse's cheek and the other hand on the nose or noseband. Keeping the neck straight and centered on the chest, ask the horse to turn her skull only, by slowly and softly bringing the hand on the halter noseband towards you a small distance while the hand on the cheek goes away from you at the same time. Press lightly, then soften and allow the horse to expand into the space between you.



Stuck: Bracing, bulging of neck muscles, joint blocked and unable to move, horse backing up or tossing head to get your hands off.



Flowing: Telescoping of the neck outwards from the chest, and a small degree of soft lateral flexion where the skull joins the neck.

Thoracic 1

(deltoideus, triceps brachii, supraspinatus, infraspinatus, trapezius, cervicothoracic joint)

- * **Purpose:** To assess and mobilize the shoulder girdle, allowing the horse to begin engaging the elastic rebound system. Also, lifting the leg forward while taking a step rather than bracing against the ground with the forelegs, shifting the weight forward, and pulling the foreleg using muscles of the lower neck. To facilitate a release of the base of the neck and lift of the base of the sternum.
- ? **Why:** Correct biotensegrity (degree of tension and relaxation) in the thoracic sling is necessary for the withers to lift and the elastic rebound system of the forelimbs to engage, reducing the weight carried on the forehead and the concussive impact on the forelegs.
- ◆ **How:** Place one hand on the side of the halter noseband and the other hand on the horse's near the front of the horse's shoulder, above the point of the shoulder (e.g., deltoideus muscle region). Slowly and softly bringing the hand on the halter noseband towards you a small distance while the hand on the shoulder goes away from you simultaneously. Press lightly, then soften and allow the horse to expand into the space between you.
- **Stuck:** The horse may really lean on you, race off quickly, or stand still but brace against the movement.
- 😊 **Flowing:** Your arms and the horse's body between your hands will make the shape of a sphere, and the small weight shifts will feel light and soft. The horse will show signs of softness, such as licking and chewing or partially closing her eyes.

Thoracic 2

(trapezius, latissimus dorsi, external intercostals, serratus ventralis thoracis, external abdominal oblique)

- * **Purpose:** To assess the separation between the shoulder and the barrel and improve mobility of the thoracic spine in lateral bend.
- ? **Why:** In addition to the benefits listed for T1, to facilitate the lateral bend of the thoracic spine. To release tension of muscles over the ribs for easier breathing.
- ◆ **How:** Align your forearm vertically just behind the shoulder in the fleshy area there. Remember to keep the connection to the horse's head or other secondary location, and to your feet and back also. This can be quite a stretch for small people! Apply pressure through the elbow area of your forearm, and then a slowrelease. This can also be done during movement.
- **Stuck:** No movement away from your arm, leaning into your elbow, bracing, backing up, escaping away.
- 😊 **Flowing:** You'll feel the whole body soften around your arm and horse may open the poll and lengthen the neck, showing general signs of softening.

Lumbar Sacral

(gluteals, biceps femoris, semitendinosus, gluteal fascia, lumbodorsal fascia, lumbosacral joint)

- * **Purpose:** To assess and mobilize the hips and spine.
- ? **Why:** Symmetrical swing of the hips allows the impulsion from the hind limbs to carry forward evenly through the spine, facilitating rhythmic movement and development of elastic gaits with cadence.
- ◆ **How:** Place each hand on either side of the tail on the bony area (ischium). Add a slight amount of weight to one hand and then the other alternately, ensuring both hands stay in contact with your horse. You can also use the dock of the tail and the point of the hip. Send a small undulating movement through the horse's spine.
- **Stuck:** no movement, stiff, horse walks forward.
- 😊 **Flowing:** hips swing gently and equally from side to side. The horse's nose gently moves in the opposite direction of your more advanced hand as the undulation travels up the horse's spine and evenly in both directions.

3. COMING THROUGH WALK - Assisted

Ideally, the horse's muscles, tendons, ligaments, and fascia distribute tension throughout the body so that movements are elastic and symmetrical. Braced or overly tense areas are often reactions to weak or overly mobile areas and need to be protected.

We wish to soften the braced areas and strengthen the weak or overly mobile areas. Doing so at the walk provides a safe, effective way to assess our horse's abilities while simultaneously preparing the horse for more difficult physical feats.

- * **Purpose:** To provide the nervous system with input at a slow, balanced walk by amplifying movement at the Poll. Doing so continues the movement of the synovial fluid and warms the whole body up in a slow, methodical, and symmetrical way.
- ? **Why:** In Step 2 we mobilized portions of the horse's body that were braced. Now, soft rhythmic movement will allow the horse's nervous system and tissues to redistribute tension and the pull of gravity, creating a more even biotensegrity and providing protection for weak and overly mobile areas that may be exposed to damage now that the brace has been removed. This controlled walking with guided movement of the spine is a continuation of the process of warming the muscles and redistributing tension evenly throughout the whole body.
- ◆ **How:** Walk next to your horse in a straight line. As before, first focus on your own walk. Become balanced and rhythmic by centering and aligning your spine. Then, without disrupting your own balance or that of your horse, take contact with your horse's body with each of your hands. The easiest way is to gently use one hand to take contact on the noseband of the halter and gently place the other hand at the back of the cheek. Join your horse in the walk, embodying what you'd like the horse to do. Now, gently ask for lateral flexion in one direction, as you did in Step 2. Guide the horse's nose back to being straight in front of its chest and see if the horse can telescope the neck without rushing or falling on the forehand. Gently ask for lateral flexion in the other direction. Repeat this reprise several times, feeling for changes in the horse's body, the rhythm of the strides, and the undulations of the spine.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST:

What has changed since the walk at the beginning of this warmup? What has stayed the same?

Anything that you assessed, visually and/or through feeling, can be evaluated again after performing the coming-through-walk assisted, or after your ride, and over time, to assess progress. Become more aware of your horse's body and of any changes in your horse's movement during Steps 2 and 3. Then, use your observations to plan your riding (or groundwork) program to gradually build up your horse's weaknesses.

As you become more effective at performing my Strategic Warmup and using your observations to plan your rides, your horse will advance more quickly.

- Straightness – can you both walk in a straight line or is there drifting happening? Where is the drift to and away from? Over the course of the warmup, you may notice that your horse is more able to move in a straighter line.
 - Position of the ribcage – which side of the horse is the ribcage swung towards and away from? There may be less of a difference between the two sides now.
 - Closing joints – are there any closing joints that you can observe or feel? Are any joints moving more freely? Is overall movement more flowing?
 - Striding limbs – can you observe or feel any shorter striding limbs? Is the movement more even now?
- **Stuck:** rushing, slow lethargic walk, always drifting in one direction, heavy in your hands.
- 😊 **Flowing:** feels easy under your hands, clear straight lines, focus on handler.

Now, if you found this guide helpful and would like to learn more...

Then you'll definitively want to...

Speak With Us

I'd like to invite you to have a one-on-one session with one of our Team Specialists to create a personalized plan to help you create your ultimate dream horse.

Now, before we go any further, you need to know...

There is absolutely NOTHING for sale during this one-on-one session.

Yep, even if you ask nice, we won't sell you anything.

Period.

Our singular objective is to share the roadmap to harmony with your horse and beyond—the exact same strategy our top students have used, which only becomes more effective and relevant as time goes on.

By the time you're done, you'll understand EXACTLY how to connect with your horse on every level and how to gain consideration from your horse so you can have communion and be seen as your horse's partner.

Then, you'll discover how to turn that ultimate partnership and willing horse into consistent results without needing to turn your warmup and ride into an obedience session, sculpt your body, or frame your horse's body into a 'cookie cutter' position, feel like you just can't manage all of the instructions coming your way, or be coach-dependent ever again.

Here's my challenge to you:

Take me up on this invitation and [book your session now.](#)

If you're ready for a change, let's make things happen.

Come to your session prepared to share your...

1. Specific goals and passions, which will define your personalized strategy for creating growth
2. Biggest takeaway from this report
3. Current level of experience riding and training your horse
4. Level of commitment to your vision and passion for learning riding skills and tools as well as self-improvement.

This is an important part of our program because riders step up and take action, commit to a path, and see it through.

I promise you this...

If you fully commit to gaining the right knowledge at the right time and skillfully applying it, my process will be LIFE-CHANGING for you and your horse.

[Book your session now.](#)

Your best supporter,



C. Adderssen