

→ *Instructing* ←

INSTRUCTING PHILOSOPHY

To achieve the truly elite level of dressage, you have to understand instructing. Instructing is the practice of commanding a line of riders. It takes skills, precision, timing, dedication, and a deep love and passion for dressage. Instructing takes trial and error, and we hope this section of the website can help you eliminate some of the errors.

WHAT MAKES INSTRUCTING A CHALLENGE

Instructing is being able to actively and effectively communicate with a team of people. While that may seem straightforward, many caveats and challenges will arise. While a concept or idea may make sense in your head, you may be explaining it to a fellow rider in a way that just doesn't click. You have to take the perspective of someone who is in line. Not only do you have to understand inline work, but you have to be able to understand all the moves, screen delays, gaps, and alignment from your end as well. It is like a different world to be a commander vs a rider, but you need to understand both to reach your full potential.

WHY INSTRUCTING

At TRR we like to think about how everyone's 'ultimate' dressage goal is different. For some, the end goal is owning a club or team and for some, it is being a competitive rider. Everyone has different things that they enjoy, and that come naturally to them.

We believe that for those who are interested, instructing is one of those things. It requires you to take your prior knowledge and translate it to others. That takes a ton of work.

As mentioned above it doesn't matter if it makes sense to you, it is your job to be adaptable and change your methods for those in line.

THE 5 P's

- 1) Personality
- 2) Presence
- 3) Preparation
- 4) Passion
- 5) Professionalism

These are the fundamentals of instructing.

STARTING A LESSON

When riders enter the arena, they will follow rider set-up, but as an instructor there are a few things have to do to set up both yourself and your rider line.

SETTING UP YOURSELF

SCREEN SETUP

We always recommend having 2 screens for instructing.

One for your lesson plan and notes, as well as Discord, and one screen for Star Stable.

This is because the constant jumping back and forth between tabs can slow your computer down.

This is by no means necessary but it is so helpful.

It doesn't need to be a monitor or a second computer, it can be a tablet, or even your phone with your lesson plan on it!

IN-GAME SET-UP

When you get to the arena, you should immediately make a group with the other high ranks or instructors.

This will be good for quick and easy communication during your lesson.

Whether you are a brand new instructor, or a seasoned pro, being able to ask questions to others in a private chat which can be great depending on what you are working on.

No one knows everything, so lean into the others around you for support.

ARRIVING

Always show up in the proper outfit, on the proper horse, 10 minutes before the lesson starts.

Always greet the riders and ask how their day was.

It is just a polite gesture that makes the commander-rider relationship a little less serious.

Just because you are a commander doesn't give you any leverage, or a position

LINING UP YOUR RIDERS

When you are lining riders up for dressage you base it on speed as well as experience.

Four things affect your speed list how you should prioritize these things:

Player level

Horse happiness

Your horses level

Your outfit and horseshoe stats

The higher the player level, the faster you are, however after level 20, there isn't a big difference in speed. So past that point prioritize experience.

There is a time and a place to teach new leads, but you decide when that is, and if you would like an experienced rider as a lead.

Your horse's happiness is a huge factor in the lineup.

While a green happy face and a yellow frowny don't have a huge speed difference, a green happy face and a red mad face do.

The speed and response time decrease in sad horses is very noticeable.

You might have noticed that some people who have sad horses will have a slower response time.

You can be an elite rider, with incredible timing, gaps, and alignment, but you will always be late on a slow horse.

We did a test, with Ari on a sad vs. on a happy horse.

Ari is very experienced in dressage, but couldn't keep up with a line, and struggled to maintain any proper gap or alignment on the sad horse. Ari also struggled with go timing, she had to go on 'AND' to just barely have the right timing in a proper count.

When Ari rode the happy horse, her gaps and alignment came much easier, as there was much less necessary work to maintain baseline fundamentals, meaning more difficult moves could be performed more easily.

Your horse level does affect your speed but not as drastically as happiness.

Past level 10, the speed difference becomes slight, and level 13 has all the max stats.

A horse can be leveled up to level 13 in just 2 days, so it really isn't too much work.

You might have noticed that when you inspect your character and horse, each piece of tach or clothing has a stat it gives.

As most clubs/ teams have a required outfit, everyone should have the same stats, which is why this is the least important of the 4.

Horseshoes also boost stats. You may recommend that someone who is a lower level on a moderately happy horse put on horseshoes to increase their speed just a bit.

SUCCESS

You can always follow these steps and set up for success, but you can't always plan for it.

There will be lessons when things don't go according to plan and aren't 'successful'.

There will be weeks when finals are happening, and you just can't get good attendance.

Everyone has a life outside of SSO, and it is impossible to ask for perfection from people, so have grace, and be kind.

Reach out, and ask how people are, it's not about scaring people into attending or 'doing well', it's about making them enjoy dressage, and look forward to attending practice.

WHY PLAN AND PREPARE

For most people, improv speech is not the easiest, and even if for you it is, it is so easy to get off topic and distracted during lessons and clinics.

We recommend creating lesson outlines and plans.

CREATING A LESSON PLAN

Use this format...

INTRO

CONCEPTS TO COVER (~time estimate)

MOVES (~time estimate)

Move : description

Move : description

Move : description

CHALLENGE (~time estimate)

Challenge move : description

OUTRO (~time estimate)

A lesson plan should be like a guide.

It's not a script, think of it more as having index cards to a long speech.
They help you stay on track with what you want to talk about and give you some clarity.

One of the worst things a commander can do is not know the material they are teaching, so we always recommend reviewing your lesson plan for 10 - 15 minutes before you start teaching

PREPARE FOR ALL SITUATIONS

Growing as an instructor is like adding to a toolbox.

As mentioned in set-up you need to be prepared for 'anything'.
Especially in open lessons.

A lot of time in open lessons, people will join who don't know the fundamentals to understand the material being covered.

You can't just kick them out, or shame them; you have to be adaptable and change your explanations.

Where this gets tricky is when you have a very split group.
Some people are very confident with the material, and others are not.

You don't want to hold back the confident riders, but you don't want to give a bad experience and confuse the less confident riders.

There is no simple answer, but sometimes breaking up the group is best.

PREPARE FOR SCREEN DELAY

Just like riding in line, screen delay affects instructing as well.

In line, you are actively counteracting the screen delay with gaps, but you are just focused on yourself.

A commander has to be able to look at the line and think from a different perspective to see why a rider may be behind in their gap, alignment, or in a move.

When you look at a line of riders you have to account for that.

EXAMPLE RIDERS

Bear & Cat

The line is trotting around, and Bear seems a little far behind Cat, so you can inspect the Bear, and you realize that they are on an unhappy horse.

You can do a couple of things

- 1) Ask Bear to put on horseshoes.
- 2) Have Bear move from a BOS gap to an improv gap (like the front of the saddle, or ~40%).
- 3) Have Cat take off their horseshoes so Bear can catch up a little easier.

After thinking about it you ask Bear to increase their spacing a little bit, as well as have them put on horseshoes.

This means they are now going to have an easier time keeping up.

You chose not to have Cat take off their horseshoes so they don't get slowed down.

This type of analysis is constant, so here are a couple of basic rules to help you out when watching the line.

- 1) When calling moves, there is a 1.5-second delay (2.5 seconds for halts), so always call earlier than you think you should.
- 2) When watching the line, focus on the slower people and adjust to them.
- 3) Always point out what people are doing right; strike a balance between affirmative and constructive

CORRECTING RIDERS

There is no doubt that everyone will eventually make a mistake.

It is your job as the commander to correct the mistakes.

It is so important to be specific when making corrections.

If you just say "Okay guys, fix your gaps", what does that mean?

If you're a rider in line, you would know whom the commander is talking to, and what they want you to fix, do they want you to catch up? Or back off?

Within TRR we like to make corrections like so:

"Okay Bear, you're looking a little far behind, go ahead and canter up a bit. I know it might look weird because its not a proper BOS gap, but I would rather you do that than get left behind."

Then once they correct themselves, praise them. It isn't all just constructive.

"Good job Bear! That looks much better, I can't exactly tell where you are in relation to Cat, but somewhere around the front of the saddle mark, I'd assume, so keep doing what you're doing. That looks great

TONE OF VOICE

You could be giving everyone in line awesome corrections, and have a clear lesson plan but your tone, and how you convey what you want matters.

if you're using a rude or degrading tone of voice, that won't help the riders feel good about themselves. Here are a few examples of tones, and what they might convey.

ITS ALWAYS THE COMMANDERS FAULT

When riders mess up it is 98% of the time it's your fault.

You most likely didn't prepare them well, so be accountable.

Tell them you are sorry, and be honest that even though you are a commander, you are still learning too, and making mistakes is okay for both riders and commanders.

Then talk about how you can improve and fix the situation.

Go on, retry to move, etc, and then it will get better, we promise.

DEMONSTRATING MOVES

Sometimes the best way to teach a new skill is to halt the line and demonstrate.

There are so many different kinds of learners, that breaking it down can often help people grasp the move or concept.

There are 3 main ways we like to demonstrate moves:

- 1) Have the riders move onto the overhead camera, and then demonstrate so they can watch from above.
- 2) Stream SSO over your discord call, and show them what it would look like from their perspectives
- 3) Pull someone out of line to help you demo

However you choose to demonstrate, it is for the benefit of the riders, so remember to narrate what you're doing as you're going along, and open up the floor for questions.

EXPLAINING

Just like explained above in corrections, be clear.

We all stumble, and speak fast sometimes, but try to make your definition as minimalistic as possible. 'Minimum number of steps, maximum outcome'

And after you are done, always, no matter what, open the floor for '.' and questions in chat.