

The Northwest Regional Horse Management Guidebook

A guide to setting up club level HM programs

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What is the big deal with horse management anyway?

The United States Pony Club has long put an emphasis on developing horse management skills in tandem with riding skills. We believe that good horsemen are the result of good educational programs and that the good horseman is more than just a competent rider. Some of the attributes of a good horseman as put forth by national HMO coordinator Susan Moody are as follows:

Characteristics of good horsemen

1. Knowledgeable and competent
2. Well prepared
3. Safety oriented
4. Responsible
5. Dependable
6. Goal oriented
7. Animal advocates
8. Thinkers and doers
9. Confident in their abilities
10. Accountable for their actions

If preparing good horsemen is the ultimate goal of the national HM program, then we must give local clubs the tools they need to help their members strive towards that goal. Some conditions of clubs associated

with successful horse management programs were identified through the national office by Susan Moody. They are:

1. Positive attitude and commitment to education –
 - a. Learning can be fun and interactive
 - b. Education is valuable and important
2. Setting obtainable high expectations and standards for members
3. Establishing good work habits -
 - a. Organization with clear lines of power and responsibility
 - b. Effective time management
 - c. Established structure and routine
 - d. Shared responsibilities
 - e. Follow up
4. Participation in activities that stimulate exploration and discussion –
 - a. Regional workshops
 - b. Lending library
 - c. Field trips
5. Effective regional guidance and support

If this sounds like a big task to take on, fear not! This guidebook is here to walk you through the steps to creating a club level program that will meet the needs of your members and create good horsemen in the process.

Getting Started

Begin by compiling a list of strengths in your club. This could include upper level Pony Clubbers (C3 or above), parents or sponsors with horsey backgrounds (including vets, farriers, feed dealers), super-duper 14 year-old C1s who LOVE horsey facts and book learning ... be creative and don't discredit resources just because they are from a different organization or discipline. You may have a local Warmblood breeder who can be a wealth of knowledge about the reproductive cycle, feeding and caring for brood mares and foals, and just because they aren't "Pony Club people" doesn't mean they can't teach your club a lot!

Pinpoint what you consider your club's weaknesses. Perhaps start by asking the last couple of examiners who tested your club if there were areas that most of the candidates needed help in. You may want to get feedback from several parents, your PC riding coach, former DCs. Perhaps all your older kids have moved on and you have a club full of D1s, or maybe you have some kids who are very gung-ho riders, but get below standard marks on their formals. Perhaps you are having a hard time keeping a variety of ages/levels interested at you club meetings. Taking assessment will help you see where to put energy in and where it isn't needed.

Address the amount of time that you are currently dedicating to HM in your club. Is it as much as your members and their parents are comfortable with? Are there some kids who want more or less? Are you looking for an improvement or just something different and fun to do with your club in HM, and if it is the former, is your club ready to try something new in terms of scheduling? Making all the plans in the world won't help your club if no one is willing to come to unmounted lessons. Which brings us to the next point –

Setting Goals

Setting goals that are generally agreed upon by the families in your club is paramount to organizing a program to fit your club's needs. Your club may be full of new Ds who just need a basic horsey education in bite-sized servings. If so, a reasonable goal would be to prepare a lesson program that will teach them safe work habits around the barn, make them more conscientious toward their equine partners, and allow them to reasonably work towards a higher rating over the next two years. However, your members may want to compete safely and with confidence at rallies or send a team to Quiz. You may have a club that has members in many age and rating groups. It is vital that you consider the desires of members and their families who may want to move up the ratings or try for a qualifying team. The percentage of each rating test devoted to HM testing increases with each standard, and HM judging at a qualifying rally is more meticulous than at a D rally. In any of those cases, your club may choose goals such as:

- Hold two ratings per year
- Teach all the HM areas tested at a rating in each lesson group once a year (or every 18 months or every two years)
- Field well prepared, safe teams to three rallies and Quiz each year.

There are no right answers for what goals your club should have, but setting goals will allow you to come up with an appropriate time frame and level of complexity for your program.

Once your club has agreed upon the direction they wish to go in, it is appropriate to help the individual members consider personal goals. This is a great activity for the first meeting after New Year or after new officers are elected in the fall and can be done as part of a brainstorming session with the whole group. Goals may be as simple as learning to apply a bandage or taking the D3 rating that year.

After members have chosen one or two or three goals for the year, help them come up with action plans to make those goals a reality.

An action plan for learning to longe might be:

- a. read the PC longeing handbook,
- b. arrange to watch your instructor or a knowledgeable upper level PCer longe
- c. locate a horse or pony that is a known safe longer to practice on the first few times
- d. borrow or purchase the equipment you will need to start longeing
- e. get acquainted with the equipment without the horse
- f. arrange for a lesson or group clinic with a knowledgeable instructor to practice longeing your safe mount for the first few times
- g. make longeing under supervision a regular part of your routine to become adept

Setting concrete goals lets Pony Clubbers focus and adds a greater sense of accomplishment to successfully attained goals.

You can now overlay the club goals with the individual members' goals. Thus, if you find that four members wish to take the C1 rating next fall, you can structure your lesson plans to cover the test requirements over the upcoming months. Perhaps a study group should be considered, or specialized clinics may be needed.

Rally teams should be planned well before entries start being mailed out. Especially if many members have identified rallies as a goal for the upcoming year, your club may wish to sit down after the regional calendar comes out and consider to which rallies the club would like to field teams. If available, horseless rallies are an ideal way to introduce new members and their parents to the rallying experience without the added tension of having a pony in tow. Perhaps you will identify five rallies - games, D showjump, regional showjump, polocross and regional eventing, that members are interested in attending that year. If six riders and one stable manager want to ride in the D showjump, the "team" can plan study sessions to go over the sport's rulebook, learn the items on the required equipment list and how to use them, and get in extra training sessions together with the rally coach. If all six are still able to ride when entries have to go in (and we all know how often a horse or two will end up with a lameness before a rally!), everyone can draw straws and the two extra can always form one half of a catch team. If only two or three people really want to do the eventing rally, you can look for catch team

members from other clubs. Catch teams can be a great way to make new friends and get fresh ideas to take back to the club. Identifying teams early can give the members a chance to help each other be prepared and gives them a greater sense of camaraderie. Especially for youngsters who may never have say, played games, identifying the desire of members to attend a rally several months in advance gives them the chance to learn the knowledge and skills needed to have fun and be prepared.

After goals have been set and activities like rallies and ratings have a date down on the club calendar, the rest of the regular club meetings, both mounted and unmounted, should be planned for the months in between. Solid planning three to six months ahead, while looking even farther into the future, will give your club the structured preparation to stay on track to goals. This also makes it easier to fill in "hold harmless" insurance applications, which require locations and dates in advance.

Some clubs meet weekly or bi-monthly, but at least one mounted and one unmounted meeting a month should be the minimum in most circumstances. Some clubs do most of their unmounted in the winter and then ride all spring and summer. Others take Dec/Jan and July/Aug off for family holidays and vacations, while still others make use of the time kids are out of school for special activities. Larger clubs may have Ds and Cs meet mostly on separate days except for occasional all-club activities. Sometimes smaller groups, like rally teams or rating study groups, will meet independently more often than the club at large.

HM at club activities

One of the best ways to make HM a regular part of Pony Club, not just something for ratings and rallies, is to include a little HM at every mounted meeting. At the most basic, clubs should always include mandatory safety checks before each lesson where unsafe equipment can be identified and parents can know what needs to be replaced. It is good to use your Cs under supervision of a parent who has learned the ins and outs of good safety checks to perform this activity. Many clubs create club policies covering expectations for members, instructors and sometimes even parents for club activities. These often include behavior, attire and turnout expectations for lessons such as, "Members shall wear close fitting clothing with shirts tucked in and hair neatly back." Clarifying expectations helps members adopt higher standards and incorporate good practices into a regular routine. Clubs that set high standards for safety and turnout at all Pony Club activities show respect for the proper care of the horse and tack and respect for the instructor who can better

assess a young rider's position if it isn't hidden under baggy, ill-fitting clothes. Older members can check each other or a parent can take this responsibility. ***Negative criticism should be discouraged – praise the good and give positive encouragement in areas that could use improvement.*** Look for progress from lesson to lesson and reward members that consistently come with clean, neat mounts, tack and attire.

After the lesson, a cooling out and trailer area check can be made. This discourages members from tossing the reins at mom while they run off to talk to their friends or from quickly tying a pony up to the trailer, dumping the tack in a heap in the dirt and leaving grooming tools and buckets lying around under the pony's feet. Recognition or small prizes can be awarded to the best turned out or the most orderly trailer area at each mounted meeting.

Horse Management can also be built right into the body of a lesson. Especially for younger Ds who may have shorter attention spans and muscles that can't sustain long periods of intensive riding, mixing knowledge with riding can turn a dry lesson into a fun and educational game. Shirley Antrobus, British Horse Society Certified Instructor and long time Pony Club teacher, recommended a few fabulous exercises and I added a couple more:

1. Name parts of the horse, pieces of tack, colors or breeds for a couple of minutes with the group before starting the ride or in warm-up. Older members can answer a few questions about nutrition, proper cooling out procedures or veterinary practices – the mounts get some time to warm up slowly and the riders stay sharp and perhaps learn something from another member who may be more versed in a subject than he or she.
2. Create a race where riders walk or trot down to the far end of the arena and there answer a HM question or locate a part of the horse on a large drawing pinned to the wall. Once they have answered correctly, they return to the starting point. Three or more riders can race at once to side-by-side stations to rev up the game atmosphere.
3. Have similar races to identify and retrieve items from a grooming box or pile of tack. For rally teams preparing for the season, use required equipment or first aid kits so the kids learn to identify all the items.
4. Have older members critique each other's rides. This develops critical thinking and promotes attention to form and function while improving verbal skills. *Tell them always to give the positive before the negative and to think in terms of solutions, not just problems.*

5. If you have access in your club to a karaoke machine or loudspeaker, you can play Sportscaster. Each member takes turns as the sportscaster as they watch another member ride a jump course or play a game. The sportscaster gives blow-by-blow accounts of the action as it is going on over the loud speaker. This not only develops critiquing skills, it also makes kids more confident about talking out because they are quickly having so much fun they forget to be shy!
6. When Cs finish a hard lesson, have them take the pulse and respiration of their mounts before they leave the ring. They will quickly gain a better appreciation of conditioning.

These are just a few fun possibilities. Brainstorm with parents and instructors for more options.

Unmounted lessons

A good club level program will also include unmounted lessons devoted especially to horse management education. Use the PC flowcharts to establish lesson ideas from D1s on up and include a level above the highest rated member to use as an inspiration level, such as offering some B level instruction to your older C2 and C3 candidates. If you are looking for published material to support your program, the USPC Bookstore has many great instructional wall charts such as anatomy of the foot. They also carry the booklet *Unmounted Fun* by the Inland Empire Region, full of great lesson plans for every level. You can take these lessons as presented, or use them as a springboard for other ideas. Besides using visual and written aids, instruction can take the form of a Saturday "barn day" with hands-on activities taught by upper level pony clubbers or regular Pony Club instructors or clinicians. Monthly or bi-monthly evening meetings can incorporate an hour of instruction before or after the club business. This can be targeted for the whole group or segregated into rating levels in different areas.

If you have groups of Pony Clubbers at the same rating level, study groups might be a good option. Study groups of two to six can meet regularly at someone's home, or a library, (for teenagers, the local coffee house might be considered cooler), to move through the manual and other literature such as the rulebooks and the National HM handbook, and study the sections covered by the next rating's test expectations. Enrichment reading such as *Grooming to Win* or *The Classical Seat* can even be encouraged or at least presented as an option. For each group, one or more parents should act as coordinator. That parent, with the help of a DC or a club instruction coordinator, can break the readings into sections that the members can be responsible for reading before coming

to the study session where they review and discuss it with each other. Club meetings can then focus on business or perhaps lectures by local experts. Study sessions will always need to be supplemented by occasional hands-on lessons for skills like taking pulse, temp, and respiration or longeing.

From time to time, Cs should be encouraged to prepare short (10-20 minutes) lessons for the younger members covering topics on which they have already been tested. Suggest or assign topics for them to teach and then use a game to reinforce the lesson with younger members. This will build good teaching skills in your Cs while not putting too much responsibility for educating the younger members on their shoulders. Additional presentations can be made by C and D members in the form of book reports, rally reports, or breed reports (often of great interest to Ds, so an easy way to get them started on speaking in front of their club). However, if club meetings only focus on education of the D members, older PCers will loose interest (rightly so), and there will be no incentive for them to attend regularly.

Don't alienate your older members – they are a vastly valuable component of your club that can too easily be lost to boys or softball if they aren't challenged and inspired.

Sometimes multiple clubs can combine resources to hire special mounted and unmounted instructors just for their C2s and above. Most clubs aren't luck enough to have more than one or two upper level candidates at any one time. If three clubs in an area create a special upper level program for all their older members, they may be able to build a better quality program than if they were each working on their own. Additionally, candidates get to know one another and feel less stressed come rating time when they see several friends in the testing with them.

If you have Bs, HAs or As in your club, consider hiring them as regular HM instructors with some form of compensation. Compensation could be payment for a prep clinic or rally or even a non-Pony Club competition if that is what they are doing. Per the national policies, cash is best left for travel and materials reimbursement when current Pony Clubbers teach. Use but don't abuse your upper level members if you are lucky enough to have them, and take measures to make more by having challenging programs and keeping membership up! With national averages of just over 70% of all members being Ds, 20% C1-C2s, 6% C3s and the rest made up of B-As, an average club needs around 20 members to keep at least one or two current C3 or above members.

Building the next generation

If you have a trickle of members at different ages and rating levels, a **mentor program** may serve you well. When a new member joins, an older C or above can be teamed with the new member to integrate them into the PC world. The mentor PCer explains how ratings and rallies work, helps with tacking up and turnout at lessons if necessary and preparation for the first rating. The mentor program can last for the first year or longer depending on your clubs desires. As the new member gains skills and moves up, the mentor can be a good resource – a big sister who looks out for their well being puts them on track if they get off it. Often kids will listen to each other better than they will to a parent, so if their big sister tells them that they are slacking off, they may actually shape up without complaining!

It is very important that every new member is required to get a D Pony Club manual of his or her own and start reading. Parents are responsible for assuring that their children do their school homework, and parents of new pony clubbers MUST help their children get through the D manual sections to be covered at the next meeting and to get through everything covered at the first rating (usually held within a relatively short time after joining). For young members, that may mean reading 15 minutes together every night. I believe wholeheartedly that parents should understand what their children are being required to learn and reading the PC manuals is the best way to start. Besides, you don't want your daughter saying, "Mommmy!!! That's not the right way to tie a lead rope!" You get that enough anyhow; why not try to stay ahead of her for a while?

The USPC National Office has recently put out a new publication called **Junior Pony Club**. It is a step-by-step program to prepare young children and their parents for joining Pony Club. If your club gets a request from a parent and you think the child may not have a lot of horsemanship skills yet, the Junior Pony Club program can help the parent, child, and instructor work together to bring the child up to the point where he or she will be ready to join the PC ranks. This program is as much for the parent as for the child and covers things like arriving in time to groom and tack up before a lesson, safety around a mounted and unmounted lesson, and what to expect from Pony Club involvement. The program uses the Usborn Beginner Rider booklettes, very inexpensive and colorful references for the child a little to young to read the D manual.

Choosing HM instructors

After you have considered your club's strengths and assets, set reasonable goals, and formulated a selection of learning opportunities,

you will want to build a foundation of good teaching. Use your list of club resources first. You may find that you can do most or all of your teaching within your own club. However, you may also want to supplement your club's resources with outside help from regional examiners, graduates or HM judges. You want to inspire your members to be complete horsemen, so select instructors who respect the unmounted portion of their learning equally to the mounted. Discuss with your instructors, both mounted and unmounted, your club's Code of Conduct and what is expected of the members under their supervision. If you hold a bandaging clinic for example, and an HA from a neighboring club is coming to teach, be sure that all the members who will attend know what materials to bring and how they should be dressed (barn footwear, no dangly jewelry, etc.). If you aren't explicit, you can't be surprised if a 15 year old didn't think to come as you wish (but I'm not riding! Why shouldn't I wear my hoop earrings?). At the same time, let the visiting HA know that you wish for her to demonstrate the same high standards in attire and demeanor as your members. This isn't being picky; it is just making sure that your members see good roll models.

If you have visiting experts such as farriers, vets, etc., take the time to inform them what Pony Club is all about and what you are hoping your members will get out of their exposure to this professional. Sending them a copy of the standards early with the area of specialty highlighted (foot and shoeing for example) will give the guest a framework for creating a demonstration or talk. That's not to say that the guest experts should limit themselves to what is on the standards. Quite the contrary, PCers should be exposed to many ideas and approaches, and a vet may be able to give far more depth on a topic like parasites than your members could otherwise get through the club. This is especially true when preparing for Quiz where strange bits or different feeds may be presented to identify.

Experts may be able to do their thing best on their own facility. Field trips to breeding farms, feed manufacturers, race tracks, equine hospitals and the like can really capture the interest of your youngest to your oldest member alike.

Remind your members to **thank every instructor, organizer, host, or guest lecturer individually each and every time!** There is no substitute for good manners and a simple thank you may make all the work worthwhile where bad attitudes and a lukewarm reception will turn off an instructor even if the pay is reasonable.

Club Roles

Besides instructors, your club will also need a set of parents to attend to some of the nuts and bolts of running a HM program. Here are a few roles I suggest – they can be rolled together into one person, but often a little delegating is a good thing.

Safety checkers – make sure that you have at least three to five parents who are very well versed in this easy-to-learn but vital role so that you can be assured of having at least one present at each mounted activity to do the checks or better yet, supervise your Cs doing it. Pony Clubbers should never be left with full responsibility for the safety of other children, so supervision by an adult for all PC teaching is mandatory.

Record book reviewer – if someone checks all the record books monthly (started at the D2 level at least three months before the D3 rating and KEPT UP CONTINUOUSLY FROM THEN ON), members will stay up to date, and won't try to cram in a year's records right before a test. Besides that, record books are an ideal way to increase your members' understanding of the costs associated with riding (and how good mom and dad are to make it possible) and to keep track of training improvements and health trends. As most any professional will tell you, good records are an essential part of good horsekeeping; they are not just for tests.

Study/rating group coordinator – this person should keep her group, whether it is all the Ds or just the D3 candidates, on track. Using the standards, this person makes sure that her group is covering all they need in their mounted and unmounted lessons. The parent doesn't have to be able to bandage herself or recognize a kimberwicke bit, but she should speak up if bandaging hasn't been addressed at the club level this year. If study groups meet outside of other club activities, the group coordinator makes sure everyone covers the chosen topic and assigns the next chapter or topic to cover at the next session.

Club Instruction Coordinator – this person uses the *PC flowcharts* to plan mounted and unmounted activities that will educate the members toward the goals selected by the whole club as well as by the smaller sub-groups. In conjunction with the DC (and often with the input from the other parents), the instruction coordinator makes sure that appropriate instructors are hired and that they cover the areas selected.

Club Libraries

One great tool your club can provide its members is a PC library. The prep guides for the ratings contain lists of required and supplemental reading for each level. The Quiz committee also keeps a list of resource materials. The club can use funds to purchase a few titles a year that any member can check out to study. That way families aren't putting out so

much money individually, but every member has equal access to the literature. The library can be housed in plastic storage bins and brought to at least one monthly unmounted meeting so that members have a chance to check materials out. The rating/study group coordinator or club instruction coordinator can review the list for the next rating with the candidates when they declare their intention to rate and encourage them to start checking out readings early on. If members go off to college, they may choose to donate one or two books that they feel they will no longer use. Old magazines can be donated to the library for more kids to learn from. Each member should own their own *Pony Club Manual* appropriate to the rating they are at or studying for, but there are **29** required or recommended titles for the C1 alone! Spreading the costs can be a good thing for all.

After the manuals, the *HM Handbook* is the most valuable tool a PCer has to prepare for HM at ratings and rallies. No child should go to a rally without first going over the HM handbook and the discipline rulebook with her teammates and possibly an adult if the team members are younger. There are stars next to all the sections that pertain especially to the PC competitor, and these should be read right through. It could mean the difference between a successful rally and elimination.

Regional Resources

Remember, whenever your club needs help sorting out a HM problem or organizing a program, your *Horse Management Organizer* is there to answer questions or get you the help you need to get them answered. The HMO hires all the chief horse management judges for the rallies, puts on the annual HM Clinic and provides training for new and experienced assistant judges in your region. The HMO also works in tandem with your Regional Instruction Coordinator to help build solid club level instruction programs. The HMO keeps lists of good HM instructors in the area, especially graduate PCers, and they can link you up with neighboring clubs that may have current upper level members who would be willing to do some teaching. But the HMO can't help if he or she doesn't know you need it! Don't be afraid to use this resource.

The regional HM Clinic is a fabulous way to expose your members to more teaching outside of the club, as are the lower level mega-preps and the upper level preps and camps. Parents who attend these clinics with a critical eye will be better able to help their club in the future. Older members and parents who volunteer as assistant HM judges or scribes or impartial observers at ratings will learn additional reams of knowledge to take back for the betterment of themselves and their club.

Taking a look back

Once a year, take a look back and assess how your program is fulfilling your clubs needs. Often, an annual members/family questionnaire can be productive. Did you reach your Pony Club goals this year? Do you feel the club programs gave you the educational atmosphere to achieve those goals? What was the best element of the educational program? Where do you feel the club could help you more? Some clubs break down their questionnaire into sections from the test sheets with a yes/no next to each where the member or family indicates whether they felt the club's program adequately taught each section. This does not negate the responsibility for each member to study and practice on their own to achieve goals, but it recognizes the role a club can play in the continuing development of each budding horseman in the group.

If inadequacies are found in the past year's program, make a plan as to how to address those concerns in the future. Hold on to what worked best and fine-tune the program to meet current needs.

Remember to build horsemen in your club by making horse management a cornerstone of responsible conduct your members ascribe to every day, both at Pony Club activities and at home. Together, we can send our members out into the world with a solid foundation of responsibility, compassion and commitment that will serve them in all aspects of their lives well into their futures.