



LEVEL E HORSEMANSHIP | CHAPTER 01

The Classical Scale of Training

How correct training develops one stage at a time

A good rider does more than complete an exercise. You learn to notice how the horse moves, how the horse responds, and whether the work is creating better balance and confidence. The Classical Scale of Training gives you a way to organize those observations.

A system for every discipline

The Scale of Training is a sequence of six connected qualities: rhythm, relaxation, contact, impulsion, straightness, and collection. Dressage riders use these ideas, but they are equally important when you ride a jumping course, work over poles, ride on a trail, or improve a young horse.

The stages are often shown as a pyramid because the lower stages support the higher ones. This does not mean that you finish rhythm forever and then move on. During every ride, the qualities influence one another. A loss of relaxation may disturb rhythm. A loss of straightness may weaken contact. A rider must be prepared to return to an earlier stage whenever the foundation becomes uncertain.

THE SIX STAGES AT A GLANCE



TRY THIS IN YOUR NEXT LESSON

Choose one stage before you mount. During the ride, notice one moment when it improves and one moment when it becomes weaker.

STAGES 01 TO 03

The Foundation of the Scale

Your Level E goal

At this level, you are not expected to produce advanced collection. You are expected to recognize the six stages, explain why they matter, and begin noticing them while you ride.

01 Rhythm

Rhythm is the correct and regular sequence of steps in a gait. The walk has four beats, the trot has two beats, and the canter has three beats. When the rhythm remains clear, the horse can organize its body and the rider can follow the movement. Rushing, slowing without being asked, or taking uneven steps can disturb the rhythm.

Rhythm does not mean slow. A horse may move with energy and still remain regular. Your job is to feel whether each stride belongs to the same gait and whether the tempo stays steady enough for the horse to remain balanced.

02 Relaxation

Relaxation means that the horse can work without unnecessary physical or mental tension. A relaxed horse is not sleepy or inactive. It can remain energetic while breathing normally, swinging through the back, and responding without fear. Tension may appear as rushing, stiffness, a hollow back, a fixed neck, tail swishing, or an anxious expression.

03 Contact

Contact is the elastic connection that travels from the horse's active hind legs through the body to the rider's receiving hands. It is not a head position and it is not created by pulling. Correct contact feels steady enough for communication, yet soft enough for the horse to move freely and trust the rider's hand.

Think like a rider

If the contact becomes heavy, first ask whether rhythm, relaxation, and forward energy are still present. Stronger hands rarely repair a missing foundation.

RIDER CHECK

Count the rhythm. Look for signs of relaxation. Feel whether the contact stays soft and steady.

STAGES 04 TO 06

Developing Power and Balance

04 Impulsion

Impulsion is controlled, energetic thrust created by the hindquarters. It is more than speed. A horse may travel quickly while falling onto the forehand, and another horse may travel at a moderate tempo with powerful, elastic strides. True impulsion requires rhythm and relaxation because tense or hurried energy cannot move freely through the body.

05 Straightness

Horses, like people, usually have a stronger and a weaker side. Straightness means that the hind feet follow the path of the front feet and that the horse travels between both of your legs and reins without drifting through the shoulders or hindquarters. Straightness matters on straight lines, circles, turns, and approaches to fences.

You must also consider your own straightness. Uneven weight in the stirrups, a collapsed hip, or one hand held farther back can make it difficult for the horse to stay aligned.

06 Collection

Collection develops when a strong, balanced horse carries more weight with the hindquarters, becomes lighter in the forehand, and shortens the frame without losing energy or rhythm. Collection is not produced by pulling the reins or simply riding more slowly. It grows from correct work through all the earlier stages.

An important limit

Understanding collection is part of your theory education. Producing true collection requires strength, experience, and years of correct training.

FOUNDATION CHECK

If the horse loses balance, ask which earlier stage needs help first. Then check whether your own position is helping the horse stay straight.

APPLY IT

Using the Scale During a Ride

Imagine that your horse begins to rush toward a line of poles. The first answer may not be a stronger rein. You can return to rhythm with a calm transition, restore relaxation, and then approach again with a clearer tempo. If the horse drifts on the approach, straightness becomes part of the solution. The scale helps you search for the cause instead of reacting only to the result.

The same thinking applies in dressage. If a circle becomes unbalanced, check the rhythm, your own position, the horse's relaxation, the quality of the contact, and the alignment of the body. Advanced movements never replace these basics.

Chapter review

1. Name the six stages of the Classical Scale of Training in order.

2. Explain why rhythm is different from simply riding slowly.

3. Describe one sign of relaxation and one sign of tension.

4. Why is contact not created by pulling the reins?

5. Explain the difference between impulsion and speed.

6. Why can collection not be produced correctly before the earlier stages are established?

MY NEXT RIDE

One quality from the scale that I want to notice more clearly:

UDJC PRINCIPLE

Correct training has no shortcuts. When a problem appears, return to the foundation and rebuild the quality one step at a time.