

## **Peggy Brown's Voice Aids for Training, Riding, and Driving**

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**“An aid is anything that aids in the communication between rider and horse.” Spanish Riding School**

**The most important aid is the clarity within the trainer's mind - what we in Centered Riding call “having clear intent”.** The trainer must have a clear understanding of what it is she wants and where she wants it; she must know what speed, what rhythm, what tempo, what energy, and what line she wishes the horse to follow. Most training problems are caused by a trainer who does not really know what she wants, where she is going, or by a trainer who tries to achieve the end result without understanding the intricate training process it takes to get there. A good trainer understands the use of all of the aids and how to apply those aids in the correct position, timing, and rhythm in order to support the movement. A good trainer understands that the horse is a living being and is not always perfect, she does not sweat small mistakes, but instead searches further for the correct behavior and movement and rewards it. Often taking a training step backwards is the secret to moving the horse forward in his training. Horses, like people, learn from praise and not from punishment so a good trainer understands when to apply the whip and when to stop for a treat or a pat. A good trainer knows ahead of time what is going to happen and makes an adjustment or correction before it happens. When things go wrong, change the exercise, analyze the behavior or movement of the horse, ask what is the most important piece that is missing right now, what does the horse not understand, and then turn or change the exercise into something the horse knows well or can succeed at. Set the horse up for success not resistance, not failure, not mistakes, not punishment, set the horse up to succeed and to shine. Understand that we are engaged in an intricate flowing dance between species and that we will both step on each others' feet at times, or lose the beat of the music, when we are learning to dance together.

The voice and the breath are the most important avenue for clarifying in our own minds exactly what it is we want the horse to do – when we can say it or when we can breathe it, we can clearly communicate to the horse what we would like him to do. Peggy Brown

**“If you don't get it in walk, you won't get it in trot, and you certainly won't get it in canter.” Sally Swift**

**Whoa** – Means to stop, stand and wait, never use it to slow down a horse. The halt is the most important gait for every horse to understand.

- aaaaannnd whoa – by breathing and prolonging the “and” sound one can give the horse time to respond smoothly and in balance. Timing of the voice is dependent on the necessary distance required for the horse to smoothly stop. This will vary based on the horse's training, strength, speed, balance and weight of the rider, the footing and the terrain. Give the horse time to find and use his feet to feel secure in his balance as he comes to a halt.

**Walk** – Proceed forward in a cadenced and energetic four beat walk

- aaaannnd walk - by breathing and prolonging the “and” sound one can give the horse time to respond as in a down transition
- Tango, Walk! By using the horse’s name you get his attention, let him know something is coming, wake up, get ready, step lively! We all like to hear our names, so do horses.

**Walk On** – Lengthen the walk stride

- Often accompanied by a “power breath” this command is *only* used for a lengthened walk

**Trot** – Two beat working trot with attention to rhythm and tempo

- Tango, Trot! – prerequisite for an up transition it gives the horse time to respond but we should expect a snappy up transition
- aaaannnd trot by breathing and prolonging the sound one can give the horse time to respond

**Trot On** – Lengthen stride in trot

- Accompanied by a “power breath” this command is *only* used for a lengthened trot

**Canter** – three beat canter with rhythm, balance, and suspension

- Power breath in canter can lengthen the stride and energy level to a medium canter, a lengthened canter or even further into a hand gallop
- Calming breath will shorten the stride and will slow the speed

**Ho Ho** – Means to shorten stride and slow the gait you are in, shorten stride

- Accompanied by a shortening breath or calming breath it signals horse to collect and rebalance and becomes the precursor verbal signal for collection

**Linker** – German for “left” pronounced linke. English or farmer term might be “haw”

- Used to prepare the horse for a left bend or a left turn. Especially valuable in sharp sudden turns in competition jumping, eventing, carriage driving and a useful tool in training.

**Richtig** – German for “right” English or farmer term might be “gee”.

- Used to prepare a horse for a right bend or a right turn. Especially valuable in sharp sudden turns in competition jumping, eventing, carriage driving and a useful tool in training.

**Back** – Asks the horse to rein back one step at a time using diagonal pairs of legs

**Step Up** – Take a few steps forward and stop.

- Only used for asking the horse to take a few steps forward and then to halt. Used primarily in carriage driving to ask a horse to immediately step forward after backing and to return to its original position. Can be useful in ground work and handling from the ground.

**Over** – or “Step Over”. Asks the horse to step sideways

- Used primarily in groundwork, grooming and tacking up, asks the horse to move his hindquarters, forehand, or middle section sideways. Can come in useful for maneuvering through trail obstacles and reinforcing direction in lateral work. Important in driving for asking the horse to “fan” a vehicle sideways.

**Easy** – Or “Steady” means to calm down and slow down a bit. Relax, no worries here, slow it down.

**lck!** – No that is not what I am looking for, try a different behavior. Be careful of the word “No” because to a horse it sounds like “Whoa or Ho”

**Good** – That’s right, you’ve got it! Fantastic! Super! Wow! You are one smart horse!

- Accompanied by a smile, you will get the message across. Recent studies have shown that a rider’s smile and voice are understood clearly by the horse and are transferred telepathically between the brains of horse and rider. Besides when you smile, you look like you are having fun and that’s what you are here for right?

**Peperoni** – I have never used this word as a voice aid or as a cue but please know and understand that you can train a horse to respond to any word that you choose. The most important factor is that you are *consistent* in your voice aids.

As a trainer, you should establish a training vocabulary, a system of communication aids that you use all the time and in all situations with your horse. Horses do understand word sounds and tone of voice *if these communication tools are consistent!* Take the time, as I have here, to put down your system in writing. What commands will you use with your horse? What do they mean? What behavior do you expect from your horse? What tone of voice accompanies each command? What energy level accompanies each command? Where does your breathing come into play?

As you go forward as a horsewoman and a trainer, you will begin to establish a system for how you train and handle your horse and how you train and handle yourself when you are around your horse. This philosophy or this system is developed by your own life experiences, by instructors and trainers you have worked with, by books you have read and videos you have watched, and by each and every horse you have ever handled. This system is *your system* of training, it belongs to you, and it should be always evolving and growing as your understanding of the horse continues to deepen and grow. The only danger is if you pick a piece from one source and a piece from another source and a piece from over here and then try to put the puzzle together with pieces that do not fit together – impossible! You establish the puzzle pieces for your training system and your training philosophy.

A true horse trainer is an artist who is deeply invested in creating and developing the magical flow of movement and understanding between horse and rider. Peggy Brown

