relaxation

self-evaluation

Knowing where you are gives you a good baseline and starting place. It is also motivating as you have a clear goal and can keep track of progress. This is especially helpful if you're struggling at some point, as we all do when it comes to training horses and reaching our goals!

Even more importantly, this is a way to take control of your own improvement. You can progressively advance and enhance the quality of your training from a zero to a three, from a three to a five, from a five to a seven, and even have some eight to tens along the way!

Get in the habit of scoring yourself and your horse. It's what great horsemen, trainers and riders do naturally.

How to Score

In many competitions the scores are well defined, but it often does not apply to every day riding, training and the harmony you experience between you and your horse. Here are the important factors to keep track of as you train your way into a happy relationship with a happy horse… mentally, emotionally and physically.

In the chart to follow you'll be invited to score yourself and your horse on some important elements. On the left side you'll see the higher scores and ideal goals. On the right side you will see the lower scores and problems you might be experiencing.

Take a few minutes to focus on this and write down your scores, together with a date. Depending on how rapidly you progress, you might want to retake the evaluation again in 3 – 6 months.

How to know your score? Your facial expression and feeling will help you know!

0 1-3 4-6 7 8 9-10

in the stall or pasture

DATE _____

Goals 7 - 10	**Score** *Write your score between 1 – 10*	**Reality** 0-6
Friendly		Aggressive (active dominance) OR… Aloof & Disinterested (passive dominance) OR… Afraid (hides behind others or in corner of the stall/turns away/ runs away)
Comes to you with positive expression		Ears pinned when coming to you or when you approach; OR… is hard to catch
Lowers head to halter		Evades halter
Walks calmly to you		Drags behind you or pulls ahead / away; jigging, restless
Stands still for grooming - without being tied or is loosely tied		Can't stand still, tries to bite or kick, swishing tail, pinned ears. Has to be tied/cross-tied
Trusts you everywhere - mouth, ears, flanks, sheath / udder, lower legs (especially hind legs), under tail		Has lots of trouble spots - especially those sensitive areas (mouth, ears, flanks, sheath / udder, lower legs (especially hind legs), under tail
Stands quietly for saddling - without being tied or is loosely tied		Can't stand still, bites or kicks during the process. Has to be cross-tied
Accepts the bridle willingly - without being tied or is loosely tied		Hard to bridle - head up, clamped jaw, etc.

ground exercises & riding

DATE _____

Goals 7 - 10	**Score** *Write your score between 1 – 10*	**Reality** 0-6
Level head - *near withers* OR… Lowered head - *between knees and chest* Note: *This is willingly offered as a sign of relaxation, not asked for or forced*		High headed *(well above withers, nose and chin are up)* OR… Head is too low, below knees Note: *This is not relaxation it is hiding from pressure*
Soft eyes, blinking; soft nostrils		Eyes wide, unblinking; Nostrils tense and flared
Soft muzzle and lips		Tight muzzle, distorted lips
Regular, rhythmic breathing		Irregular breathing
Easy to bend neck and body with hand or leg		Difficult to bend. Neck and body are tight and tense rather than soft and supple.
Stands still to mount and stays still after mounting. Head is level, eyes are soft and blinking		Can't stand still for mounting, head goes up and eyes get wide when mounting
Soft and responsive to seat, rein and leg		Bracey against seat, rein and leg - resists and chomps on the bit, pushes against your leg
Goes as fast as you want		Goes faster than you want *(Impulsive)*

Goes as slow as you want		Is dull, unwilling and unresponsive, OR... Freezes up with tension and cannot go forward easily
Positive expression - *ears are soft and mostly pointing forwards, one ear sometimes flicking back and forth paying attention to you.*		Negative expression - *ears pinned back, out to the side, or floppy (mentally switched off). Ears softly back can mean trying, but not yet understanding or confident about the goal.*
Softly swinging tail		Swishing tail, clamped and tight tail, "J" tail - tip is pointing upwards
Supple, flexible muscles - all over		Tight, stiff, bracy muscles - the wrong ones: jaw, ears, under neck, shoulders, biceps, back… especially lower back
Little to no sweat (except under saddle or bridle headpiece, or if it is hot weather) *NOTE: From a behavioral point of view, sweat is not necessarily a sign of "good work."* *Physical overwork, without enough breaks, will also cause emotional tension*		Sweats too easily, more than would be normal for level of physical exertion. Excessive sweating, and froth, is usually more emotional rather than physical. Sweats in odd places - muzzle, around ears and eyes, flanks, top of rump, ribcage… Froths at bit, on neck under reins, under saddle pad, under rider's leg, between thighs, etc.
Quiet mouth, relaxed jaw		Chomping mouth, grinding teeth, popping lips, open mouth, tongue displacement. *The occasional shifting of the mouth and bit is not an issue.*
Focused on the goal - is in harmony with you mentally, emotionally and physically		Fizzy, easily distracted, spooky

NOTE: If your horse easily passes these tests (9-10) you will need to make sure you balance RESPONSIVENESS with RELAXATION. A friendly, confident horse will soon challenge your leadership. Rather than say "NO" and smack the horse or defend yourself, teach your horse to be more responsive. Horses do not understand punishment, but they do understand boundaries and yielding. If your horse is confident and pushy, progress quickly to MODULE 3: RESPONSIVENESS!