Basic Groundwork Series: Phase One

Mastering the Basics

1. Objective

The purpose of Phase One is to establish and consolidate the fundamental principles of groundwork before progressing to more advanced exercises. This test is not about speed, tricks or perfection. It is about developing a horse that understands, trusts and responds confidently to its handler through light, considerate communication.

The horse should demonstrate willingness, relaxation, understanding and responsiveness throughout the test, with minimal pressure and reliance on equipment.

2. Test movements

No.	Exercise	Desired outcome
1	Willing haltering	Horse willingly lowers its head into the halter and stands calmly while it is secured.
2	Calm leading	Walks calmly alongside the handler around the enclosed area.
3	Halt	Responds to the request to stop and remains relaxed.
4	Backing up	Takes four controlled backward steps using light cues.
5	Waiting	Remains stationary while the handler steps away, without continuous pressure.
6	Recall to handler	Willingly walks towards the handler when invited.
7	Forequarter yield	Calmly moves the forequarters away from the cue.
8	Hindquarter yield	Calmly yields the hindquarters away from the cue.
9	Left walking circle	Moves out onto a circle to the left at a calm walk.
10	Right walking circle	Moves out onto a circle to the right at a calm walk.
11	Final halt	Returns to the handler and stands calmly.

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Exercise requirements

Phase One: Test procedure

Exercise 1: Willing haltering

Begin with the horse without a halter in a safely enclosed round pen. Approach calmly and invite the horse to lower its head into the halter. Judges look for willing participation, a relaxed lowered head, minimal physical manipulation and standing still while the halter is secured. No chasing, intimidation or restraint.

Exercise 2: Leading and halting

Lead the horse around the enclosed area at a natural, relaxed walk before asking for a halt. The horse should maintain an appropriate distance without pulling, crowding, rushing or continuous pressure on the lead rope.

Exercise 3: Back up, wait and recall

Ask for four controlled backward steps, then stand still. Move approximately two steps away. After five seconds, invite the horse to return. The horse should understand the difference between backing up, waiting and coming forward. Keep the lead rope relaxed wherever possible.

Exercise 4: Forequarter yield

Ask the horse to move its forequarters through approximately 90 degrees in each direction. The movement should be controlled and balanced, with minimal movement of the hindquarters and without excessive pressure.

Exercise 5: Hindquarter yield

Ask the horse to yield its hindquarters through approximately 90 degrees in each direction. Look for light communication and controlled movement without rushing, excessive swinging or significant tension.

Exercise 6: Walking circles

Invite the horse to move away onto a circle. Complete one full circle in each direction at a calm, consistent walk. Judges assess departure, rhythm, relaxation, communication, maintenance of gait and change of direction. No trot or canter is required.

Exercise 7: Final halt

Invite the horse to return, halt and remain calmly alongside the handler for five seconds. The test ends with both horse and handler relaxed.

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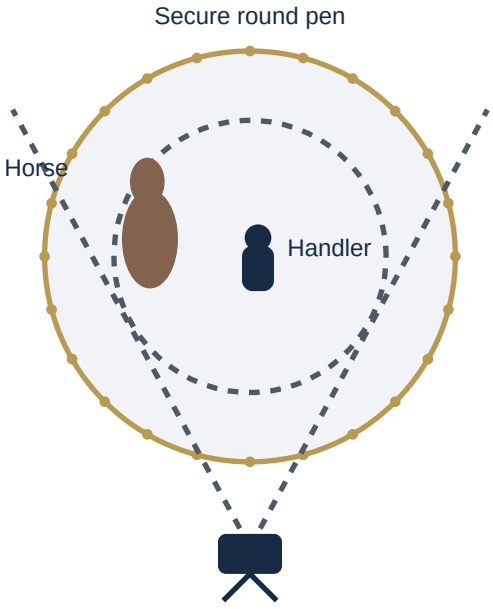
Safety and recording

Phase One: Competition requirements

3. Test environment and safety requirements

The entire test must take place in a securely enclosed round pen with the gate closed, a suitable level, non-slip surface and no unnecessary equipment or potential hazards. Handlers must wear appropriate safety clothing, protective footwear, gloves and a correctly fitted equestrian safety helmet. The horse must be physically comfortable and suitable for the exercises. Never wrap the lead rope around the hand or body. Discontinue the test if horse or handler safety or welfare is compromised.

4. Camera placement



Camera arrangement: overhead view, not to scale. Position the camera outside the round pen, preferably slightly elevated, so judges can observe the entire working area. The camera must remain stationary. Record all movements in one continuous video, including initial haltering. No editing, cuts, music, filters or playback speed changes. Retain original audio.

5. Permitted equipment

Permitted	Not permitted
Correctly fitted flat or rope halter	Choke chains
Suitable lead rope or groundwork line	Pressure-enhancing attachments
Voice, body language, positive reinforcement	Electric or restrictive training devices
Appropriate protective equipment	Equipment used to intimidate or punish

Declare any additional training aids for assessment. Necessary safety equipment will not negatively affect the score.

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Judging and progression

Phase One: Assessment standards

6. Judging and scoring

Each of the eleven movements is marked out of 10 (110 points). Four collective marks are each scored out of 10 (40 points). Total possible score: 150 points. Judges assess communication and emotional state as well as execution. Appropriate patience and processing time should not automatically be penalised.

Mark	Description
10	Exemplary
9	Outstanding
8	Established
7	Consistent
6	Competent
5	Developing
4	Emerging
3	Inconsistent
2	Deficient
1	Fundamentally lacking
0	Not demonstrated

7. Phase One achievement levels

Percentage	Achievement
90% to 100%	Gold: Outstanding Partnership
80% to below 90%	Silver: Confident Partnership
70% to below 80%	Bronze: Established Foundations
60% to below 70%	Developing Foundations
Below 60%	Further Foundation Development Required

Recommended progression to Phase Two: at least 70% overall, with no individual movement scoring below 5.

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Rules and philosophy

Phase One: Welfare and conduct

8. Disqualification criteria

Disqualification may occur due to excessive force, punishment, deliberate intimidation, unsafe handling, prohibited equipment, significant welfare concerns, external assistance or failure to comply with recording and safety requirements.

9. The Madrix philosophy

The aim of this test is not to establish how much control a handler has over a horse, but how effectively the two can communicate.

Handlers are encouraged to recognise subtle changes in body language, allow the horse sufficient processing time and reward correct responses through appropriate release and reinforcement.

A quiet horse is not necessarily a relaxed horse. Judges should recognise the difference between genuine confidence and behavioural shutdown.

Phase One focus

No speed marks, obstacles, poles, trotting, cantering or advanced liberty work. The focus remains on establishing solid foundations before introducing more complex tasks in Phase Two.

HORSE FIRST. ALWAYS.

Communication · Connection · Confidence

Before we ask for more, we must ensure that our horses truly understand the basics.

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Judges’ score sheet

Basic Groundwork Series: Phase One

Horse: _____ Handler: _____
Entry number: _____ Judge: _____

Test movement	Max.	Awarded
Willing haltering	10	
Calm leading	10	
Halt	10	
Backing up	10	
Waiting	10	
Recall to handler	10	
Forequarter yield	10	
Hindquarter yield	10	
Left walking circle	10	
Right walking circle	10	
Final halt	10	
Movement subtotal	110	
Collective marks		
Communication and clarity of cues	10	
Connection and willingness	10	
Confidence and emotional wellbeing	10	
Lightness and appropriate release of pressure	10	
TOTAL	150	

Percentage: _____% Achievement: _____

Marking scale

10: Exemplary • 9: Outstanding • 8: Established • 7: Consistent • 6: Competent • 5: Developing • 4: Emerging • 3: Inconsistent • 2: Deficient • 1: Fundamentally lacking • 0: Not demonstrated

Judges’ comments

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