

# BEFORE YOUR FIRST HORSEBACK RIDING LESSON

## Where to find an instructor, what you should look for, and what to prepare.

*By Katherine Blocksdorf, About.com Guide*

**WHERE DO YOU FIND A COACH** I've provided some ideas to help you find a riding lesson coach you are comfortable with. Usually, if you already have a friend who rides, they can suggest a riding coach. If not, there are other easy ways to find a riding lesson coach or instructor right for you.

**Question:** Riding Lesson Coaches - How Do I Find a Riding Instructor or Coach?

There are many ways to find good riding instructors. The best way is by word-of-mouth. Do you have a horseback riding friend? They may already know just the right coach for you. If not, here are other resources.

**Answer:**

**You can start looking for a riding instructor by:**

- Looking in your phone directory. The business directory or yellow pages may have listings under categories like 'riding stables' or 'horseback riding'.
- Going to a horse show.
- Check bulletin boards of feed and tack stores.
- The same organizations that offer accreditation for coaches and instructors keep directories of the coaches they've qualified. You can also contact breed associations, and other local horse clubs.
- Ask at the stable you drive by on the way to the farmer's market or work. Perhaps they don't give lessons, but they'll probably know someone that does.

**WHAT MAKES A GOOD INSTRUCTOR?** Happy students, a safe environment and healthy horses are just a few of the things you should see when visiting a riding lesson stable. Do credentials guarantee you've found a good riding lesson coach? Maybe, maybe not. Here are other things to look for when choosing an instructor or coach for horseback riding lessons.

**WHAT YOU SHOULD ASK A RIDING LESSON COACH OR INSTRUCTOR?** There are some things you will want to ask a riding lesson instructor or coach before you start your horseback riding lessons, whether you bring your own horse or use a school horse.

**Question:** Horseback Riding Lessons - What should you ask a riding coach?

When I visit riding stables for lessons, what should I ask the riding instructor or coach?

**Answer:**

- How long have they owned and ridden horses?
- How long have they been teaching riding?
- What insurance do they carry?
- Have they competed in horse shows, trials, or competitive distance rides? What is their specialty? If it's dressage and you want to trail ride, it may not be a good match.
- Do they hold a current first-aid certificate?
- Do they hold any other credentials like accreditation?
- How many students do they currently have?
- How long have the lesson horses been owned? Beware if they brag of the great bargain they picked up at auction last weekend. And ask how old the horses are. Don't be alarmed if many are older horses, but do be suspicious if there are any horses under the age of four. Older horses are better for riding lessons, especially for beginners.
- Do they offer private lessons or will you be in a group? First-time riders should have private lessons until they are able to competently control the horse. Lessons of over six riders can be overcrowded making it difficult to maintain a safe distance between horses. Instructors will have a harder time giving students individual attention in larger groups.
- How long will the lessons be? You may have a choice of partial or full hours (or more). A partial hour may be better for younger children or those of us of a 'certain age'--at least until our flexibility and strength increase.
- How much will the lessons cost? You can expect lessons to start at \$25 and go up. It's not unusual to pay \$40 or more for a one-hour private lesson. If you book and pay month or more in advance you may get a discount.
- Can you ride your own horse? You may have this option if you can trailer your horse in.

**WHAT THE INSTRUCTOR SHOULD ASK YOU?** Your riding lesson coach will need to know a few things about you. Here is what your riding lesson coach should be asking you.

**Question:** Riding Lessons - What does your riding lesson coach need to know about you?

Here is what your riding lesson instructor or coach should know about you before you begin your lessons.

**Answer:**

- Do you have any riding experience?
- What sports do you participate in and what's your general fitness level?
- What are your goals?
- Do you have any issues such as vision or hearing, or any physical issues?
- How confident are you about riding?
- Do you have your own helmet and riding boots?
- Do you have insurance? Consider buying liability insurance. Inexpensively priced through your national, state, or provincial horse association, it may protect you should a horse under your control hurt someone else.
- If you aren't satisfied with your interaction, try another stable. You should feel respected and relaxed talking with a coach. It may take a while to find an instructor that you feel comfortable with.