How to Tack a Horse with an English Saddle and Bridle

The purpose of this instructional set is to educate you on the proper procedures to safely and effectively tack your horse with an English saddle and bridle prior to your riding lesson. It is important that this is done properly to ensure that you and your horse have a safe ride. If this task is done incorrect it could cause injury or death to you or your horse.

If you lack confidence in working with and around horses do not hesitate to reach out to your instructor or other experienced individual for supervision and assistance. You should already have your horse adequately groomed before following this instructional set. Also your horse should be secured in crossties or safely tied at a secure fixture before proceeding. If you follow this instructional set it should take no longer than 10-15 minutes to properly tack up your horse.

Properly tacking your horse up is important for you to have a safe ride. Following these procedures will help ensure your ride is safe and fun.

Below is a list of everything you will need in order to properly tack up your horse. There is also a diagram showing the various parts of the items you will need. It is important to gather all necessary items ahead of time and place them near your horse.

- Helmet
- Saddle
  - Stirrups
  - Stirrup leathers
- Saddle Blanket
- Girth
  - Leather end
  - Elastic end
- Martingale
  - Girth loop
- Bridle
  - Bit
  - Reins
  - Noseband
  - Cheek piece
  - Browband
  - Headstall
  - Throatlatch
Note: These are only the basic items one may use when tacking up a horse for English style riding. In special cases the horse you are riding may require more or less items for your ride. It is imperative you check with your instructor before tacking up a horse you are not familiar with.

Securing the Helmet

1. Place your helmet on your head in a back to front motion so that all the hair is up inside the helmet.

Note: It may be necessary to tuck any loose hairs up into the helmet.

2. Secure the helmet to the head with the chin strap by fastening the chin strap.
3. Tighten the chin strap by pulling the excess strap.

IMPORTANT: Tighten the chin strap so that no more than one finger can fit between the chin and the strap. A loose chin strap could cause death in the event of a fall from the horse.

Saddling the Horse

A diagram of a saddle is given to the right of the instructions for reference of various parts of a saddle.

4. Approaching from the left side of the horse, place the saddle blanket on the horse’s back with the front of the blanket at the top of the withers.

Note: The withers are where the shoulders of the horse meet and are located where the base of the neck meets the back of the horse.

5. Approaching from the left side of the horse, place the saddle on the horse’s back.

Note: The saddle knee roll should be just behind the front of the saddle blanket.

6. Secure the saddle blanket to the saddle by looping and securing the Velcro straps at the front of the saddle pad around the middle billet strap.

7. Either cross over to the right side of the horse from the front of the horse or by placing the hand on the hindquarters while walking behind the horse.

8. Secure the Velcro strap on the saddle blanket to the middle billet strap on the saddle.

9. While on the right side of the horse, thread the leathered end of the girth through the bottom strap on the saddle blanket.

10. Secure the leathered end of the girth to the billet straps of the saddle.
Note: Because there are 3 billet straps you will only use 2 to secure the girth to the saddle. Unless otherwise told by an instructor, use the outer billet straps when securing the girth to the saddle. This will keep the saddle in place during your ride. Using the front 2 straps will tend to bring the saddle forward while riding. Using the back 2 straps will tend to slip the saddle backwards while riding.

11. Cross back over to the left side of your horse by either walking in front of the horse or place the palm of the hand on the hindquarters while walking behind the horse.
12. While on the left side of the horse, place the martingale over the neck of the horse so that the buckled part is on the left side of the horse.
13. Buckle the martingale.
14. Place the girth strap of the martingale between the front legs of the horse.
15. Thread the girth through the loop of the martingale.
16. Thread the girth through the bottom strap of the saddle blanket.
17. Secure the elastic end of the girth to the saddle billet straps as previously done on the right side of the horse.

Note: The girth should not be too tight while tacking, the girth should only be tight enough that the saddle will not slip under the horse if the horse was to shift or walk. As a reference you should be able to slip your hand easily between the horse and the girth. No obvious space should be able to be seen between the girth and the horse.

DANGER: A tight girth while tacking will aggravate some horses and could pose as a dangerous situation for you and your horse.

Note: The girth will be tightened in the arena prior to mounting. The girth should be tightened leather side (right side) first and elastic side (left side) second.

**Bridling the Horse**

18. While on the left side of the horse, place the reins over the head of your horse prior to unfastening them from the crossties or other means of tying.

Note: Placing the reins over the horse’s head before unfastening keeps you in control while bridling.

19. Unfasten the halter from the horse.
20. Slip the halter off the horse.
21. With the headstall in your right hand and the bit in your left hand, place your right arm on top of the horse’s head and bring the bit to the horse’s lips.
Note: The diagram to the above demonstrates the hand placement. But this individual’s horse is too tall for him to place his right hand between the ears. This is an improvisation for such tall horses.

22. The horse should open their mouth when the bit is to their lips.

**DANGER:** If the horse does not open his mouth very carefully insert your left thumb in the corner of the horse’s mouth to stimulate him to open his mouth. You should not have to insert your thumb more than an inch to stimulate this action.

23. Bring your right hand with the headstall up the horse’s face as the bit slides in the horse’s mouth.
24. Place the right ear in between the headstall and the brow band first.
25. Place the left ear between the headstall and the brow band second.
26. Fasten the throatlatch on the bridle under the horse’s throat.

**Note:** A proper fitting throatlatch allows a fist to be made between the horse’s throat and the leather strap.

27. Secure the noseband underneath the cheek of the horse.

**Note:** A proper fitting noseband will be tight enough not to allow a finger through the leather and the noseband easily.

**Note:** If using a standing martingale thread the noseband through the martingale loop prior to securing the noseband.

28. Bring the reins back over the horse’s head.
29. Lead your horse to the arena.

Congratulations you have properly tacked your horse up with an English saddle and bridle! Before proceeding any further you need to wait for instruction from your instructor.
References for Diagrams


Saddle Diagram


Bridle Diagram