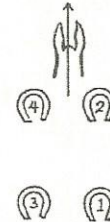
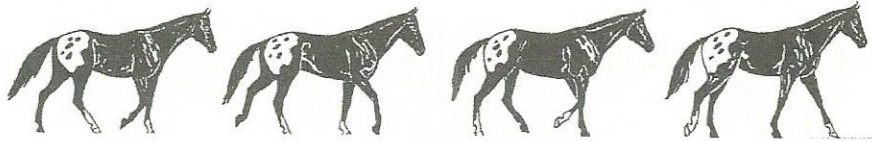
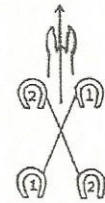
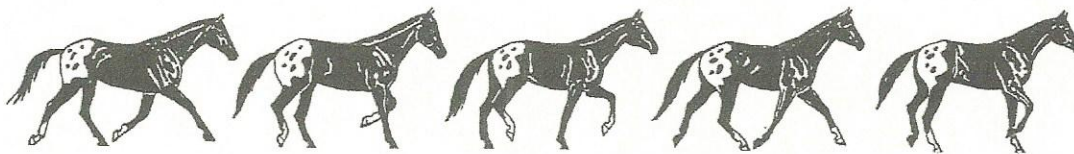


Gaits of the Horse

A *gait is a particular way of going*. Walking, trotting, cantering, and galloping are all horse gaits. Gaits are best characterized by a distinctive rhythmic movement of the feet and legs.



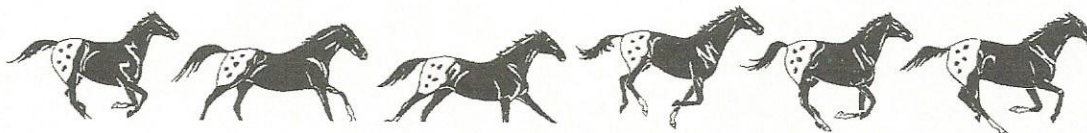
Walk. The slowest gait, four beats.



Trot. A two-beat gait between a walk and a lope.



Canter/Lope (left lead). The English term for a three-beat gait; the Western term is "lope".



Gallop (left lead). A very fast canter or lope in four beats; the horse is running.

Walk: The walk is a fairly slow four beat gait. A horse at the walk always has at least two feet on the ground, without any “air time” (suspension).

Trot: The trot is a natural two beat gait. The diagonal feet hit the ground together. There is a moment of suspension (when all four feet are off the ground). In western riding, this gait is called a jog.

Canter: The canter is a three beat gait. When a horse canters, the unpaired front leg is called the leading leg. This leg is the easiest way to identify *the canter lead*. The image on the 1st page shows a horse on the left lead. His left front leg is the leading leg. The footfall pattern of the left lead is: right hind (beat 1), left hind and right front together (beat 2), and finally the left front (beat 3). Although the left front leg is the last to hit the ground, it looks like it’s leading (ahead of) the other legs.

It is important that the horse be on the correct lead when turning a corner. Being on the correct lead allows the horse to turn easily and more smoothly. When a horse changes direction at the canter, many (but not all) horses will attempt to change the canter lead.

→**Flying Change:** change of lead performed by the horse at the canter without breaking gait

→**Cross Canter:** When the front half of the horse is on one lead and the back half is on the other lead

→**Simple Change:** change of lead is done by breaking to a trot or walk and then starting up the canter again, but on the new lead.

Gallop: A gallop is a fast four beat gait. The footfall pattern is similar to that of the canter, except the paired feet separate. The image on page 1 shows a horse galloping on the left lead. The four beats are: right hind (beat 1), left hind (beat 2), right front (beat 3), and left front (beat 4). There is a period of suspension after the lead foot hits the ground.

→Some horses can gallop up to 40+ miles per hour! In the gallop, the lead front foot bears the weight of the entire horse, therefore putting a lot of stress on the lead

leg. Race horses often change leads in the home stretch to relieve the stress onto the other front leg.

Back: The back is a two beat gait in which the diagonal legs move together. A back is actually a trot in reverse.