

Cavaletti and Ground Poles

Peggy Brown, c2020 All Rights Reserved

Advantages for the horse.

Disciplined exercise to develop and encourage flexibility of the muscles and joints

Loosens up the muscles and releases stiffness

Encourages engagement and increased straightness

The horse must bend his joints over poles and use extra thrust for raised cavaletti

Stabilizes the length of stride, balance and speed

The intent should be to maintain rhythm, balance and regularity of stride while maintaining a calm attitude

Teaches and encourages neck telescoping gesture which results in lifted softer back (basculé) and increased engagement

Teaches awareness, placement and control of the feet; surefootedness

Builds confidence, provides a tangible visual element

Teaches and encourages adjustment of balance and control of balance

Improves the ability of the horse to learn

Improves self - carriage and animation thru being asked to step higher

Teaches the horse to pay attention

A means for testing and evaluating character and intelligence

Teaches horse to carry rider in forward seat

Teaches the horse to lengthen or shorten stride

Advantages for the rider

Teaches line, placement, and clear intent

Teaches following hands and releasing hands

Teaches giving and going forward with the horse

Transitions in seat from sitting to two point and light seat

Improves awareness of the feet and grounding

Builds confidence

Teaches feel, especially of a light, relaxed back

Teaches riding the up in the gait

Teaches distance and establishes an eye for distance

Improves the use and mastery of breathing

Encourages soft eyes but targeted eyes

Teaches and improves the forward seat

Teaches the rider to stay out of the horse's way and be, as Jim Wofford so aptly puts it, "an intelligent passenger"

It's fun and different

Provides a tangible target

Equipment

4-6 poles of sufficient weight and strength, 8 to 11 feet in length, one pole is referred to as a "cavaletto"

Stands, blocks or supports to raise the poles up to 6-8 inches for walk and trot and up to 20 inches for canter

Should not be such that they roll away easily or a strained fetlock or pulled tendon may be the result

Wings or extra poles at the side to direct the horse can be useful

Reasonably soft even ground

Boots or bandages may be used to protect legs

For lunging consider side reins, lunge line, ground driving reins, surcingle, lunge whip or driving whip,

Gloves

Cavaletti work without rider

Introduction to the pole or cavaletto

Leading over the pole

Use of self in handler while leading over the pole

Cavaletti work with the rider

Begin walking over single pole allowing and encouraging the horse to look and stretch down, rider's body should be inclined forward in case the horse jumps

Increase to 3 or four poles, 2 poles may result in the horse attempting to step or jump over both at once. Begin to pick up contact and establish medium walk.

Variations in the walk could include raising one or more poles, leaving a pole out to require the horse to deal with the two stride gap.

This exercise can be used once or twice a week if horse is used to daily riding.

Distances between poles

2'8" (.6m) – 3.6" (0.8m) for walk.

4' (1.2m) - 5' (1.5m) for beginning trot not to exceed 5" (1.5m)

10' (3m) – 12' (3.6m) canter

This is an average distance for most horse although adjustments will be necessary for small horses and ponies depending on their length of stride.

Height of poles

Walk 6" – 8' (15-20cm) decrease distance between poles as height goes up

Trot 6" – 8" (15-20cm)

Canter up to 20" (55cm) – (20" is not recommended for western or dressage saddles, 12" maximum with care)

Exercises using poles

Walk poles in both directions. Raise poles for more roundness and greater bending of joints of hind legs.

Trot poles straight through in both directions. Raise poles for more roundness and greater bending of hind legs and impulsion. Change distance to lengthen or shorten stride. Don't ask for a longer stride than horse can do well.

Alternating trot poles to test evenness of gait, developing an eye, use circles, serpentines, riding an angled line.

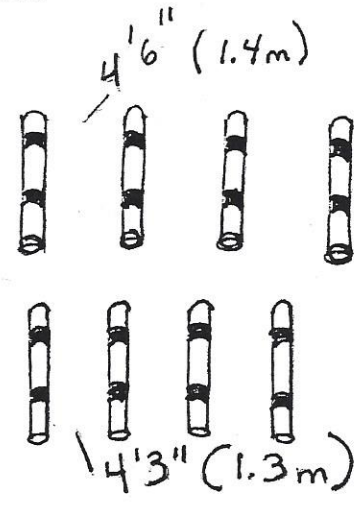
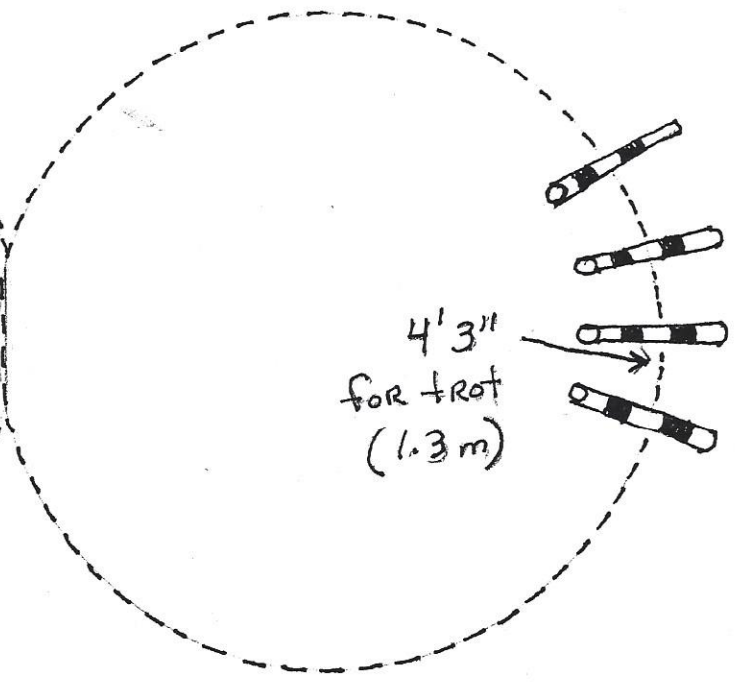
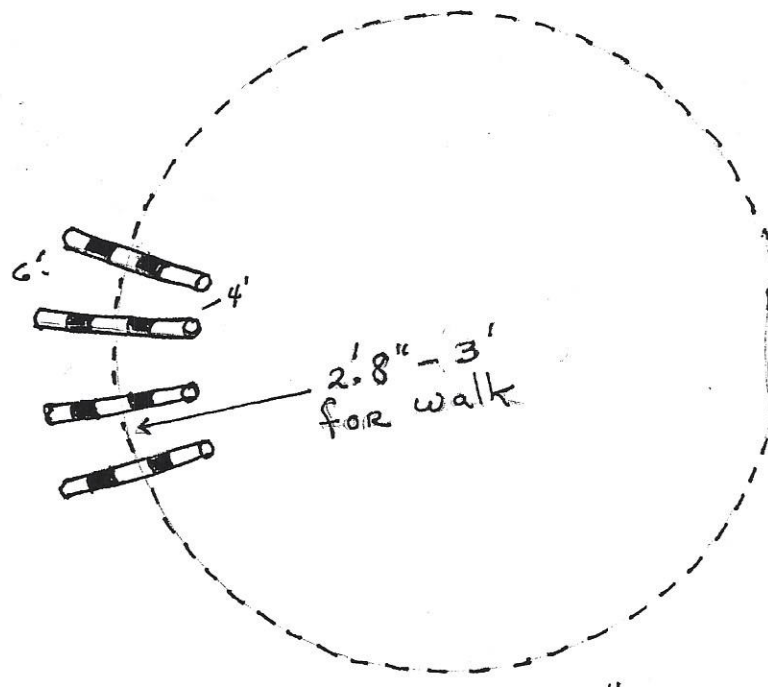
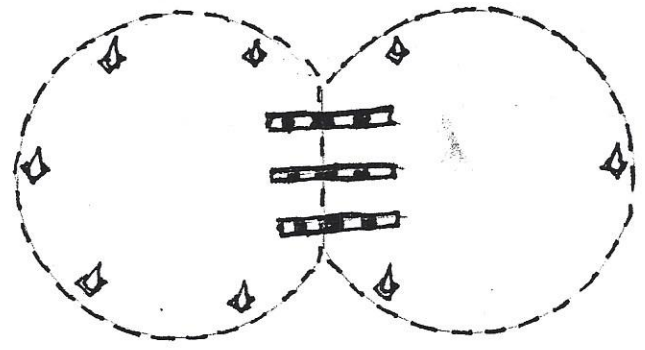
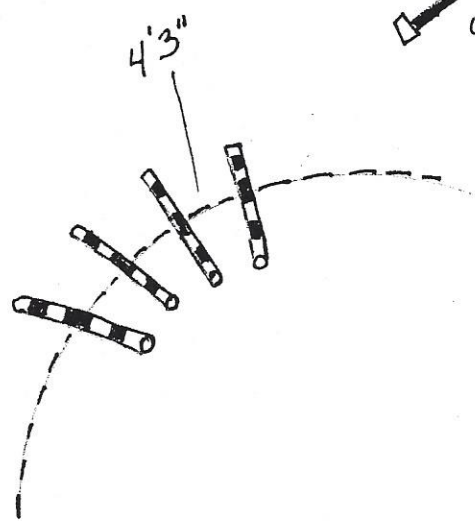
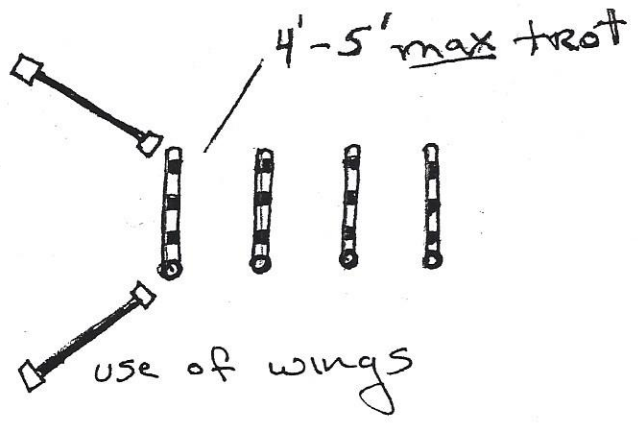
Canter straight in light seat, allowing the horse to "rock" you over each pole.

Additional Resources:

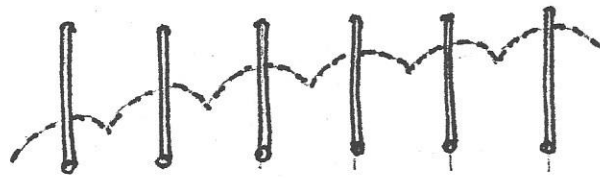
Harris, Susan E., *The United States Pony Club Manual Advanced Horsemanship, B, HA, A Levels, Horse Gaits, Balance and Movement*

Klimke, Reiner & Ingrid, *Cavalletti The Schooling of Horse and Rider Over Poles*

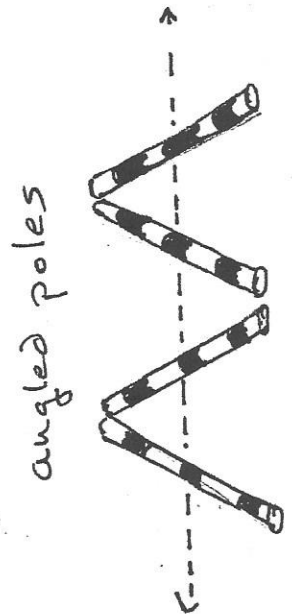
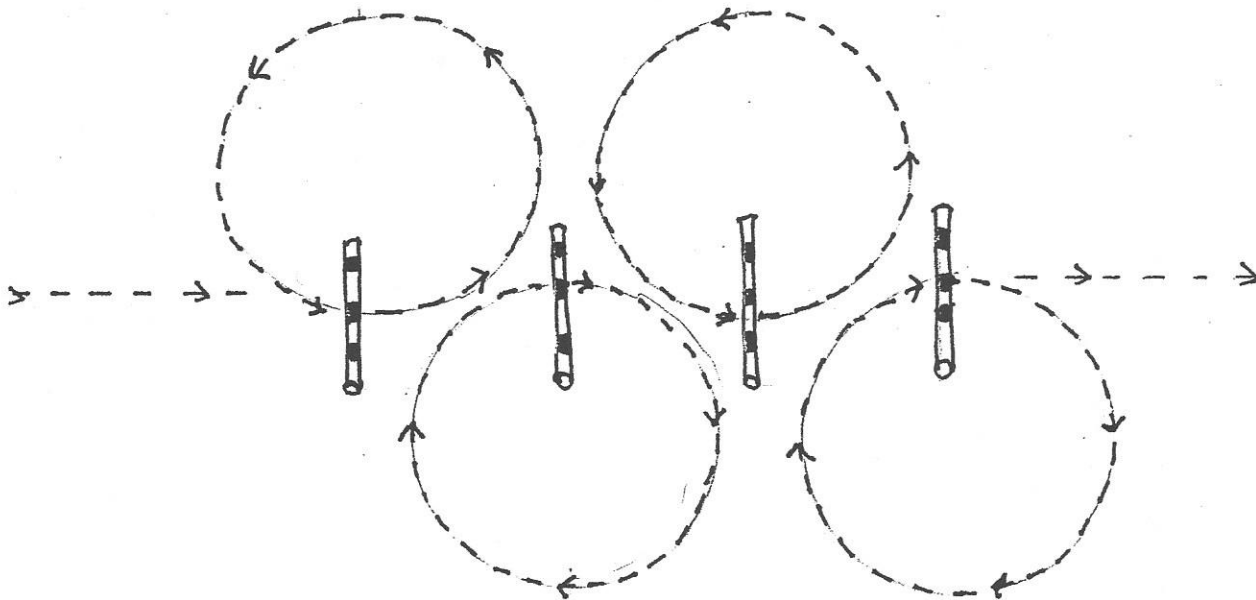
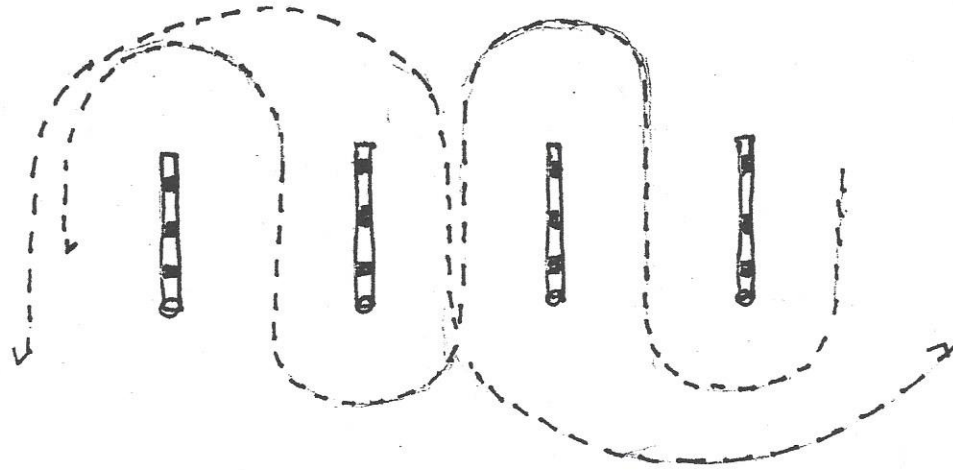
Cavalletti in Pictures



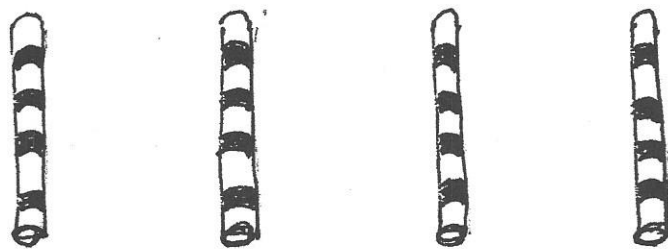
Setting poles when working alone



angle grid to
lengthen stride



Double Spaced trot poles 8'-9' (2.4 - 2.74m)



Canter 10'-12' (3.0 - 3.65m)

Peggy Brown