

YoYo Game – Game 4

Pay attention to your phases! Phase 1 is your stern gaze and your energy.

A stern gaze symbolises a horse putting back its ears.



For the stern gaze Pat Parelli coined the German word “Schwieger-mutterblick” (mother-in-law look).

Don't pull on the rope, just resist!

The aim: this game teaches your horse to move backwards and forwards in a regular rhythm and a straight line. Some horses like to go backwards quickly, but don't like going forwards again afterwards. With other horses, it's the exact opposite. The YoYo Game helps your horse to find the balance between forwards and backwards – impulsion. The supreme disciplines of the YoYo Game are the sliding stop, the piaffe and the terre-à-terre.

The basis: you are able to send your horse backwards in a straight line to the end of the lead rope from Zone 1, using soft aids, and invite him back to you with open hands.

How to take it further: there is much more to the YoYo Game than just backwards and forwards with you standing in front of your horse in Zone 1. If you play the YoYo Game walking next to your horse, you can refine transitions from one pace to another and transitions within the paces, and activate the hindquarters. If your horse has already learned to mirror your posture, he will show more elevation and collection in the transitions.

Practical exercises

Backwards and forwards in a straight line (slow and correct)

Stand up straight in front of your horse and look at him. If your horse is too close, use the Porcupine Game to send him back one arm's length (using either your hand or the point of your stick) so that he can see you. Raise the hand holding the rope, breathe in and wag your index finger left and right. Your horse should move backwards in response to your energetic aids and your signal. If there is no reaction, intensify your actions: swing the rope rhythmically from left to right from your wrist, then with your forearm and finally with your arm fully extended, until your horse takes a step back. Stop swinging the rope as soon as your horse takes a step and stands relaxed! Give him a short break and repeat the steps until your horse reacts to subtle aids and has reached the end of the rope. **Make sure that you always start off using your energy alone and don't shake the rope straightaway!**

Give your horse a break when he reaches the end of the rope and then invite him to come towards you by drawing back your belly button, smiling at your horse and “combing” the rope towards you with open hands. Don't pull! Only if your horse doesn't respond should you slowly close your fingers and resist the pressure that your horse exerts against you. If your horse takes a step in your direction, open your hands immediately and “comb” the rope again with regular movements. When your horse reaches you, give him lots of praise and a break of around 20 seconds before repeating the whole exercise. Ideally your horse should lick his lips and have a think about it. The aim is for your horse to go backwards just as willingly and quickly as he approaches you. (See the series of photographs on the next page).



If your horse doesn't stay in a straight line, you will both find it easier if you start the exercise at the wall or fence of the arena. You must also make sure that your horse's body stays straight, as the most common reason for not backing up straight is bend in the horse's body.

Unwanted bend in the horse's body is the most common cause of not backing up straight.

If you have to swing the rope up to phase 4 before your horse moves back, he will probably throw up his head and hollow his back. This is not beneficial for our advanced training, which is about healthy movement and refining the aids. However, you can shake the rope more vigorously if you want to prevent your horse from bucking or if you are in danger and need to protect your personal space.



These horses are playing a nipping game

Pat Parelli got the idea of sending the horse backwards by shaking the rope from the biting and nipping games that horses play. Young horses and stallions in particular like to bite each other's necks and duck or jump away at the same moment so the other horse can't catch them. The horse that has to move has "lost".



I recommend the following phases for healthier movement:

Phase 1: my energy and the finger signal. Phase 2: raising the stick.

Phase 3: I support the horse with the Driving Game by swinging my stick up and down in the horse's direction. Phase 4: I intensify the swing until the Savvy String touches my horse's belly through his front legs. I can take a few steps towards my horse as I do so, if he is out of reach. I also use this technique to lift my horse's back. I rectify incorrect bend in the horse's body by giving a stimulus on the lead rope.



Emergency leading at the end of the lead rope

Critical situations can arise where you want to keep your horse at a distance, where you need him to follow you at a distance or not come too close to you. Stand in front of your horse and send him back. Only be satisfied if your horse responds to phase 1 or 2. If your horse stands at the end of the lead rope, give him a break.

This explains to him to wait at a distance of three metres away from you. Now turn around and walk forwards. Your horse is allowed to follow you respectfully at a distance and to the side, and at your pace. He should stop when you stop and back up when you walk backwards. The ultimate aim is safety for the human and the horse.

What if your horse just will not move forward faster?

Option 1: keep up the invitation on the halter with the rope until your horse goes a little faster and reward the first more active step. Option 2: attempt the exercise at a shorter distance so that you can send your horse forward with the stick and Savvy String (by embracing the hindquarters). Repeat until your horse responds without contact on the halter or support with the stick.



Backing up and trotting towards you (quick and correct)

Now bring more energy into the exercise: incorporate a signal for faster for the back-up (an audible, energetic inhalation is often enough). Only use your stick until your horse quickens his pace and backs up quickly and correctly. Work on getting him to respond to your energetic aid alone. You can move towards your horse to get him to back up quickly. You should always maintain one and a half to two metres' distance between you.



What is well prepared on line, it will also work without a lead rope: trotting towards you.

Now invite your horse to come into you. Want your horse to trot towards you? Then trot a few steps backwards yourself. Reward your horse for the first stride of trot to begin with.



If I want to improve the YoYo with my horses, I start by working on the back-up until I have achieved a good quality in that exercise. Then I improve the forwards. Only then do I try both directions alternately.

Passive and active halt (different types of halt)

I differentiate between different types of halt: passive and active. A **passive halt** is achieved through relaxation, and it signals to the horse that he has just done something great. A halt in response to relaxation puts the focus on rewarding the smallest attempt at the exercise that was just improved during the movement. I like to call it “melting into a halt” because you are giving your horse the chance to read you and to respond of his own volition.

An **active halt**, on the other hand, is a collected halt on the hindquarters that is used more with a view to activating the hindquarters. Show in your body what you expect from your horse, collect yourself in your body so that your horse mirrors you.

Moving the hindquarters away from you is also a popular halt. It is mainly used to deactivate the hindquarters. It signals to your horse to move the hindquarters away, stop and look at you or stop and then come to you.



By the way, the active halt isn't about the gross motor aids that might have been necessary in the beginning if your horse was rude.

I am assuming that you have long since earned your horse's respect and that he already responds to your energetic aids. You don't have to use the rope or the stick, so you can decide which quality you would like to improve in the halt: slow and correct through relaxation or quick, correct and healthy by activating the hindquarters.

A passive halt is achieved by the trainer relaxing.

The active halt is more about collection and activation of the hindquarters.

YoYo Game for leading (you look in the same direction as your horse)

Your horse walks next to you with his head at your shoulder (Comfort Spot, see explanation on page 36) and adapts to your speed. He should speed up when you walk fast and stand when you stop.



Practise setting off in trot. If your horse doesn't come with you willingly, embrace his hindquarters with the Savvy String. If your horse runs on ahead of you, slow him down by moving the stick up and down parallel to his head. (See photo at the top of page 106)



Active canter (the horse still needs more bend).



Collected canter with an attempt at an elevated outline with the poll highest.



Transitions from walk/back-up to trot/back-up transitions – from Zones 1, 2 and 3.



Leading combined with the long and low massage (page 75). This is good preparation for mirroring your posture in motion.



A lovely example of how the horse finds relaxation through the long and low massage when being led, and mirrors the trainer's long and low posture.



Forwards and backwards with alternating vertical bend and long and low outline – from Zones 1, 2 and 3.



Leading in canter
This is one of the ways to prepare for later flying canter lead changes combined with lateral movements. (p. 173).



Leading in canter for advanced partnerships:
this is what preparation for a canter pirouette at liberty looks like.