

## CONSTRUCTING YOUR EQUINE TOUCH SESSION

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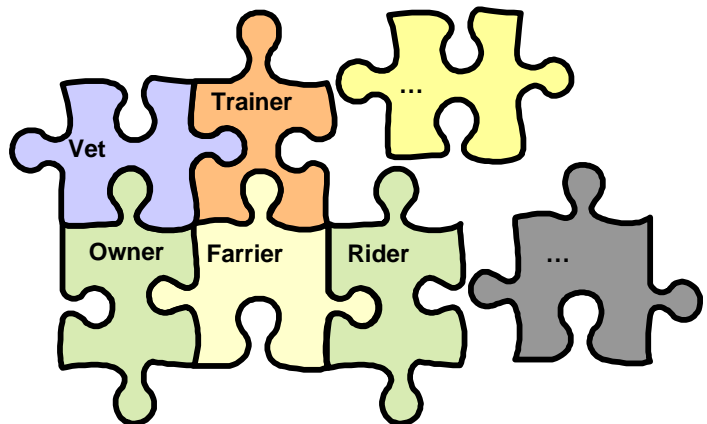
As you progress through your Equine Touch training you will have an ever increasing number of Area of Concern procedures available to you, not to mention two different body balances once you've done your Level Two. You'll be constructing your Equine Touch session and selecting procedures based on your findings before and during the session. In this article I aim to cover the sources of information that can help guide your session and try to provide an outline for constructing sessions.

I decided that this article should be called 'constructing' an ET session rather than 'planning'. We all know that the best laid plans can change and wise words (that I believe are attributable to Monty Roberts – at least that is where I heard them) are that 'it is good to have a plan but bad to fall in love with it.' In other words we can create an initial plan for our Equine Touch session based on what we've been told about the horse but should be able to revise and change it as the session progresses.

If you're not on the Practitioner Route and are using ET for your own equine friends it might still be worth running through these points: after all if we're with our horses day in day out we might not notice any gradual changes and equally we might not view information about our horse in an ET relevant way.

### The Human Point of View

Each of the human's involved with a horse can provide information of value, whether it is a formal diagnosis and advice from the vet; the trainer commenting on the horse's going and any ridden challenges; the rider's report of the horse's performance or the owner's comment on the behaviour, personality, and history of their horse. Each person will be able to add information to help you build a picture. It is worth remembering that no one person is likely to have all the information: no-one of us are with the horse 24-7, each person will view the horse from their professional or specific perspective, you may not get information (first hand or second hand) from all people involved with the horse.



You could work out a set of questions to run through, for example:

- is the horse under any veterinary treatment, advice?
- how is the horse going in its ridden work?
- when did the saddle fit last get checked?
- when did the equine dentist last visit?
- when did the farrier / trimmer last visit?
- has the horse exhibited any negative behaviours?
- any injuries, slips, trips, knocks?
- has the ridden work stepped up?
- has the horse travelled? competed?

Obviously questions will vary depending on the situation, the particular horse, whether you're doing a mental check-list for yourself on your own horse, or asking someone for details for your Horse Assessments. If you're posing questions to someone else take care on how you phrase them... when gathering my case studies and all very new to this I remember asking a horse owner the vaguest of questions about whether anything had "happened" to the horse recently and the answer was "no". During the 'branding' process I ran my hands over the horse and was nearly savaged as I reached the barrel, "oh that's the side she fell on when I brought her in yesterday," says the owner. Lesson learned: be more specific in my questions!

At the end of these conversations you will have formed some initial thoughts about the horse, its body and what you may or may not find.

### **Pre-session observation**

Before touching the horse you should use your eyes and have a good look at the horse and its surroundings. You could even put together a mental checklist – or even a paper checklist – that might run along these lines...

- Are we in safe surroundings for an Equine Touch session?
- What mood is the horse in? Quiet? Alert? Distracted?
- How is the horse standing?
- Are there any visible scars, cuts, swellings, asymmetry?
- How does the horse move?
- What shaped and condition are his feet in?

Your checklist may be shorter or longer depending on your level of study, background and knowledge base but it is still important to look and take a moment before you put your hands on.

Your observations should add information to that from your conversations and you can make your decision to go ahead with the session or not.

### **Introduction and Branding**

The information you glean from this aspect of the Equine Touch session will vary depending on your experience - I still remember my Level One course and all I could say was the horse felt like a horse. As hands on time with the horses increases so your hands will become more accustomed to 'reading' the horse and your observations and details will increase. Go slow enough for your brain to register what you're feeling. Another list of possible observations and checklist may help to achieve coherence in your thoughts and bring the detail to the fore...

- What are you feeling?
  - temperature differences that aren't down to environmental conditions (sunshine, rugs etc)
  - lumps, bumps, swellings, scars
  - reduction in skin/fascia mobility
  - differing flexibility in leg pick up
- How is the horse reacting?
  - moves away from you
  - moves towards you
  - tail swishing / ears back / turns to bite
  - uninterested
  - licking and chewing
  - head dropping
  - relaxation

Once you've carried out the branding the horse will have given you an idea if you've definitely got no-go areas, you'll have initial ideas if there may be imbalances or problems areas, or not, in the horse's body.

## Body Balance

You'll now be choosing a body balance: the default position being the Basic Body Balance unless you have a reason for using the Advanced Body Balance.

Your checklist of the horse's responses is much the same as that for the Branding.

How the horse is responding may lead you to adapt your Body Balance and move away from the proscribed order of moves – all of course depending on the degree of response.

Questions to ask

- Is my pressure just too much here?
- Should I persist gently?
- Is the horse tolerating the moves here?
- Should I leave out this particular move / procedure?
- Should I change Body Balance i.e. back to slower BBB or do continual work of ABB?
- Should I return to moves the horse liked?
- Should I stop the session?

At the end of the Body Balance you'll be asking yourself whether you want to do more moves either to further address Areas of Concern or to use these procedures for maintenance benefit.

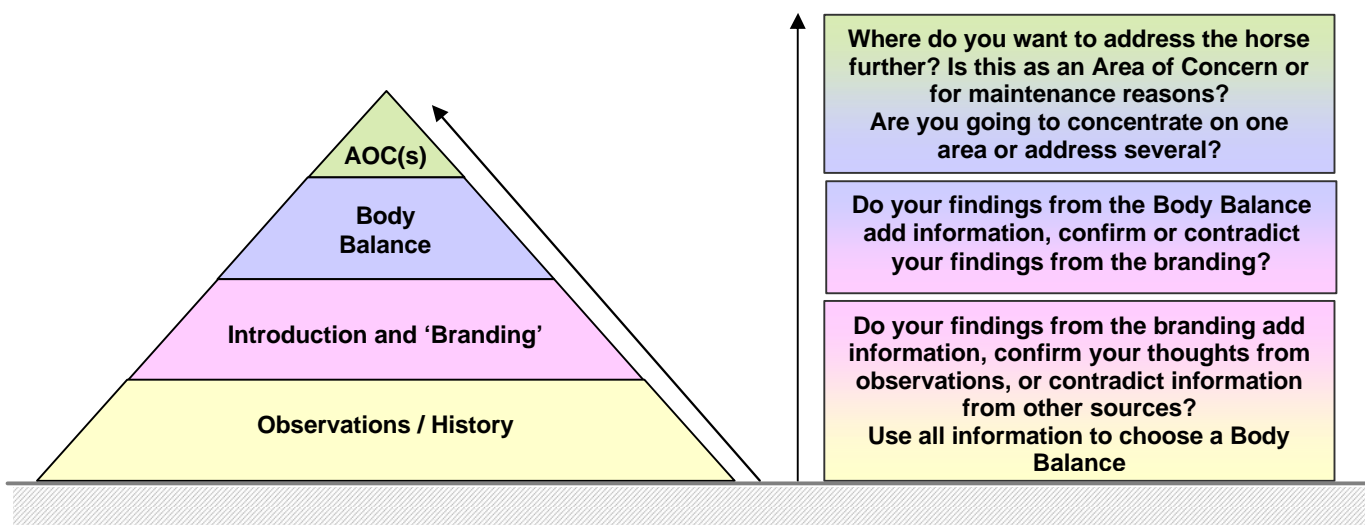
## Areas of Concern

Depending on your level of study you'll have a range of AOC procedures to choose from: Level One procedures are good procedures to address key areas; Level Two and Three procedures get more specific in their address and sit nicely over and alongside those from Level One. Don't forget any recommended pairings for AOC procedures such as the throat procedure to precede the TMJ.

Once again the previous questions/checklists from Branding and Body Balance apply here too. You'll put together a set of AOC procedures to work through using the information and feedback from the Branding and Body Balance. Consider the horse's responses at this stage of the session...

- Is this area of concern being defended by the horse? Would it be better addressed in subsequent sessions? Should I finish on a good note with the horse and gain trust?
- Is the horse so relaxed it isn't really taking any more on board?
- Am I seeing this horse again or is this my only chance for a while to do ET?
- What is coming up for the horse?

So overall you have four stages to your session, each stage provides more information to guide and form the session.



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Overall the key to the session is the horse and its response to you and the moves – you should constantly be reviewing the horse’s feedback and using it to shape your session.

