

Improve your riding and dressage skills with the Alexander Technique

by Heike Walker, Certified Teacher of the Alexander Technique

Horse riders know that communication with their horse is one of the fundamentals of good riding. Riders not only communicate with their horse through the aids they give, but also by the way in which they use their bodies. This "body use" is often unconscious. Riders may not be aware of their movement patterns such as gripping with the knees, tightening in the stomach, holding the breath or sitting to one side of the saddle. However, the horse does perceive those tensions and habitual patterns in addition to any aids that the riders give. Unfavourable habitual patterns interfere with a good communication between rider and horse.

The Alexander Technique teaches riders an awareness of their posture and movement. The rider will develop a better coordination allowing more flexibility, support and balance in the body. Over time, harmful movement patterns will be changed, unnecessary tension and excess effort will be released. As the rider frees and lengthens the spine, he gains precise use of the legs and a better self-carriage on the horse. This makes it easier for the horse to follow. The communication with the horse becomes clearer and more subtle. By simply changing the rider's own movement patterns, the Alexander Technique remarkably improves riding and dressage skills!

The Alexander Technique is particularly useful for

- riders who want to improve their coordination and balance
- riders who strive for a clearer communication with their horse
- riders who suffer from pain, injury or tension
- teachers wanting to improve their knowledge of rider positions and application of aids
- dressage riders

In individual lessons, I teach the rider to increase the awareness and improve the body coordination by working with simple movements such as sitting, standing and walking, supported by my gentle hands-on guidance and verbal instructions. Riders also work in a saddle on a wooden horse, as a way of exploring the movement patterns without the complications of a moving horse. The principles of the Alexander Technique can then be applied to horse back riding and to dressage.