

Jumping a Novice Grid



By introducing different combinations of fences set at specific distances, you can tailor an exercise to match your abilities and develop particular areas of your horse's jumping. Start with warm-up exercises, introducing your horse to each element of a simple grid before jumping it as a whole. When you have mastered this exercise, you can try bigger fences and more demanding grids to develop your own and your horse's skills further.

Warming up:

Be realistic about the demands you set for yourself and your horse. Too many horses have been frightened by difficult grids, so aim to increase the level of difficulty gradually.

For example, novice horses will benefit from being introduced to different fence fillers, but you should never suddenly introduce a new filler at the end of a training session, and especially not at the end of a grid. This is because your horse's attention will be drawn to the filler, and he may make mistakes as he jumps the fences before it. Instead, introduce a filler under a single fence at the beginning of the exercise, and use it as part of your warm-up so that the horse has the chance to become used to it.

In the grid below, the last fence incorporates two roll-up fillers (4). For your warm-up, use a placing plank 2.7 m (9 ft) away from a small fence and use the roll-up as wings. Jump the fence a few times, approaching in trot, until the horse is settled. Then move the roll-tops under the fence to become fillers. Then

you can build up the grid fence by fence, and practice each phase until you are ready to jump it as a whole.

Building up the Grid:

The aim is to keep a good balance and an even rein contact throughout. Start by riding over placing planks in walk then trot, to help achieve an even stride. Add a cross pole fence (1) to the exercise and land in canter. Next add a vertical (2) at a distance of one stride. Finally, set up an oxer two strides away from the vertical. This distance allows you time to adjust your horse's speed and direction (3) in order to achieve the right take-off point for jumping the oxer (4). Two strides after the oxer, lay out two poles in a funnel shape and a canter plank (5). Those will help keep your horse focused and maintaining an even pace, even after the last fence. Once your horse can jump the grid with ease, and you can ride without rein contact and with a consistent balance, try raising the height of the fences. **HT**

Jumping the Oxer:

If you have started the grid well and maintained a good even canter stride, you will take off at the right point over the oxer. Land in canter and keep your horse focused on the end of the grid. Only add the back pole on the oxer when you feel that your horse is jumping confidently.



Jumping the Grid: (below)

Once your horse is jumping each individual fence with confidence, you are ready to jump the complete grid. Concentrate on maintaining an even canter stride and adjust your horse's speed and direction when necessary.



Aerial Overview



Grids for all Levels

Oxers are useful because they encourage a horse to make the highest point of his jump over the middle of the fence, which produces good technique. Variations on the two-oxer grid (see below) will help any level of horse. Start with small fences and easy distances. Take note of your horse's take-off and landing points and

analyse his technique. Your first aim is to achieve a symmetrical jump. Then you can develop athleticism with shorter distances and bigger fences. The width of each oxer can be increased by 10 cm (4 in) at a time to a maximum of 1.5 m (5 ft).

Two-oxer grid:

This grid has a vertical, followed by two oxers, which are set up with two strides between them. Once your horse is jumping this well, a more advanced grid can be created by lengthening the distance between the two oxers by 30–90 cm (1–3 ft).



Reducing the distance:

Reduce the distance to the first oxer to once stride and gradually increase the size of oxers. Do this by moving the front pole forwards so that the mid-point stays the same. This will increase the angle of ascent to take-off and develop your horse's athleticism.

