

Trail Riding Etiquette: 20 Courtesy Tips for Equestrians

Manners Matter for Horseback Riding on the Trail

Trail riding is a popular endeavor for equestrians, particularly in warm-weather months. But [horseback riding](#) on the trails can also be somewhat perilous, if certain courtesy procedures are not followed.

Most trail riding etiquette is based on keeping horses and riders safe, as well as others on the trails. Usually, good manners can equal increased safety on bridle paths and trails.

Here are 20 courtesy tips for equestrians - and other trail users.

Trail Riding Etiquette: Proper Packing

Courteous and responsible trail riders will carry park passes (as needed), as well as identification, spare cash (for trail fees or snacks, if available) and cell phones (for emergency only).

Trail Riding Etiquette: Dealing with Dogs

Dogs should be leashed or left at home - by equestrians and other trail users. Loose canines can startle horses easily.

Trail Riding Etiquette: Experience Is Everything

Untrained horses and riders alike can prove unsafe on the trail. A few lessons and a little practice is essential before an equestrian embarks on a trail ride.

Trail Riding Etiquette: Having Helmets

Responsible trail riders set an example for others by wearing equestrian safety helmets.

Trail Riding Etiquette: Safety in Numbers

Trail riding groups stay together for courtesy and safety. Horses are herd animals, and they may become agitated if left behind. Wait while others mount.

Also, if one horse and rider should have to double back to leave the trail, this must be done cautiously. Horses may become alarmed at the separation.

Trail Riding Etiquette: Personal Space Issues

Equestrians should give one another plenty of leeway on the trail, rather than crowding. Even docile horses may kick at flies or startle, causing a perilous pileup.

Trail Riding Etiquette: Controlling Kickers

Testy or dangerous horses should be placed at the back of a trail riding group. Equestrians commonly tie red ribbons to the tails of horses that are prone to kicking.

Trail Riding Etiquette: Swapping Leads

If possible, trail riders usually take turns riding at the head of the group, unless certain horses or riders' ability or confidence necessitate a more consistent arrangement - or if an actual trail guide is leading the group.

Trail Riding Etiquette: Guarding Beginners

Usually, the least experienced horses (or riders) are placed in the middle of a trail riding group, so they are surrounded by more seasoned trail horses and riders.

Trail Riding Etiquette: Enjoy the Scenery

Except in open fields of familiar territory, trail riders are often expected to walk. Walking (or just jogging) can protect equestrians and natural trails.

Trail Riding Etiquette: Single File

Trail riding groups customarily ride in single file, except in wide open areas. In particular, mounted riders may be expected to cross small bridges and pass through gates one at a time.

Trail Riding Etiquette: Defined Distances

When traveling in a line, horses should have at least one horse length between them, and stallions and mares (particularly mares in season) are best separated on the trail.

Trail Riding Etiquette: Alert and Aware

Mounted equestrians need to pay attention when trail riding. Socialization on horseback is fun, but alertness can pay off, if a surprise or potential danger arises suddenly.

Trail Riding Etiquette: Fostering the Fallen

Courteous and cautious equestrian trail riders never leave a fallen rider behind. If a rider dismounts or falls off his or her horse, the entire group may be expected to stop.

Trail Riding Etiquette: Left to Left

Mounted equestrians meeting head-on should pass left-shoulder-to-left-shoulder (as in most horseback riding arenas).

Trail Riding Etiquette: Minding Multiples

Trail riding groups generally have the right-of-way over single riders (or even pairs of mounted equestrians).

Trail Riding Etiquette: Hooves Over Humans

Equestrians generally have the right-of-way over bikers and hikers. However, many trail users do not know this, so riders need to be ready for surprises.

Trail Riding Etiquette: No Uphill Battles

Horses and riders traveling uphill generally have the right-of-way over those headed downhill. Even bikers and hikers moving uphill are usually granted right-of-way, so they do not lose their momentum.

Trail Riding Etiquette: Call Out Cautions

Lead trail riders may be expected to call out warnings to the mounted equestrians behind them (for bad footing, deep puddles, fallen trees or other hazards).

Trail Riding Etiquette: Keep It Clean

Equestrians and other trail users should leave the trails as clean as they find them, leaving no trash behind.

Overall, the best courtesy guideline for trail riding on horseback is for each equestrian to make every effort to keep his or her horse calm and under control.