



## Effective Jump Setting

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[Back to Articles...](#)

### Effective Jump-setting

As a groom, some of your most stressful moments will happen in the warm-up ring, setting jumps. If you have a rider that's unorganized, this is the moment they'll ask whether you happened to bring their lucky spurs because they forgot. And if you have an aggressive pony mom, this is around the time she will start making her move to the side of the ring to yell at you, the kid, the pony, and probably anyone else in earshot. Stressful. Even though you can't control a lot of what happens in the warm-up ring, one thing you can control is how well you set jumps. It may not seem that important, but the difference being effective on the ground and a walking train wreck can also be the difference between a rider going to the ring feeling like winner or being overcome with ringside jitters. Plus, I have never been able to put a trainer in a bad mood so fast as when I forgot the cooler to drape over the last vertical, so believe me, it's important.

This brings us to Rule #1: Always come prepared. Before we even start on how to set the jumps, it is imperative that you have all the items you need for the warm up with you, beside the jump, and not in the backpack that you left by the mounting block. This means, if your rider likes to do a couple jumps with draw reins, you need them. If they like to switch the hind boots for the last vertical, have them in your hand ready to go. If your horse has issues with the water and there is the slightest chance they will want to jump a liverpool, locate it, tell the other grooms you might need it soon and be ready to grab it when you are asked. If there isn't one, you should have a cooler or a yoga mat with you to use instead. Other items I have been asked for in the warm up ring include sticky spray, a whip, spurs, a sip of water, and basically any piece of equipment that has ever been on the horse's body, even if the rider swore the last time that they hate it and would never use it again. As an aside, if you have a rider that has the strangely common habit of changing the bit or boots 20 minutes before you head to the ring, I HIGHLY suggest you bring whatever they were using before as well. The alternative is being caught unprepared and experiencing the overwhelming desire to bury yourself under the jump and stay there forever. It's an easy choice to make.

Assuming you have arrived at the ring on time, with everything you need, your next concern is getting a jump. As your rider is mounting up, it's a good idea to ask what they want to start with. If you work for an amateur, you need to ask the trainer about the plan and when they want to start jumping. This way, you can set what they need as soon as you have a jump and won't be wasting any of your limited time. Typically I want to have a jump by the time my horse is 5 or 6 trips out. In a busy schooling area, you will need to talk to the other people setting jumps to find out who is approximately five horses before you in the order, because waiting for their jump will put you right on schedule. In an FEI class, the jumps are usually assigned by a steward who has a copy of the class list for reference.

If the jumps are flagged so that you can only jump them one direction, having a middle jump is preferable because the outside jumps will both have one very short turn. Pay attention to whether there is one jump with a hole in front of it, or that is in a particularly wet or deep spot because your rider won't



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[Back to Articles...](#)

want that jump so you do not want that jump either. Depending on the space, you can sometimes move a jump slightly to get it on a better track. You can and should do this if you are able, and if you think it could mean a better warm up for your horse.

Now that you have your jump, immediately set what they told you they want, or if you set with a trainer, follow their directions. Don't forget the details. Rake the footing, change the flags so that the red one is on the rider's right, and if it's a vertical, pull back the hind standards. Make sure you have the ground line how they want it and that it's an appropriate height for the horse's level. The more you go to the ring with a certain horse, the more you'll start to get the routine. If they always jump a vertical followed by an oxer, be ready by putting the cups on your hind standards at the height you will need them and make sure you have enough poles. If you know your horse always does something at a specific point in the warm-up, like a nine-foot rail, a skinny oxer or a combination, when you get to that point you can ask the rider if they are ready for the exercise as they ride by. This will keep the warm-up rolling and will save them the trouble of having to yell across the ring. This is especially important for the small things, like the hind boots and sticky spray that are easy to forget. I worked for a rider that always wanted me to spray his boots with sticky spray before the last vertical. One day he forgot to ask for it and I didn't remind him even though I noticed the change in the routine. When he got to the in-gate he remembered but there was no time, so he walked into the ring without the sticky spray, distracted and rattled, and did not have a good trip. The same thing goes for things like tightening the noseband or putting down a guide rail for the last jump. If they usually do it, ask. Even if they want to try something different, you seem more efficient if you don't wait to be asked to do something you should really already know. Initiative and maintaining a sense of routine are the two most important things to demonstrate in the warm-up ring.

In short, be alert, be efficient and be aware of your rider's preferences. Listen for your instructions and keep your eyes on your rider so you don't miss anything. If you know your rider is turning to the jump and there is someone standing in front of it, give them a "heads up" so your rider doesn't have to stop. With an anxious rider or horse, even small interruptions like this can get them off track and make a good trip in the show ring harder to put together. At the end of the day, nobody really cares if your oxer was one hole low in the front corner, but they do care if it takes you ten minutes to set the oxer and you forgot to change the flags three times and cause a collision. It's knowing these things that will take you from being "just a groom" to being an integral part of your team's success.