



## Leg Position

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'Being in your most athletic position will allow the horse to be it's most athletic self.'

As a coach and rider, I like to say that the 'only thing you can take with you from horse to horse is your position.' Of course, we know that you also take knowledge and experience, but the one physical thing you can use to help you be your most effective on every horse is a strong foundation from which everything can start.

To me, the most important part of a rider's body to keep in check is the core – the group of muscles in the centre of the body including abdominals, lower back, and obliques. The core can't be stable if you don't have your legs under you. The old adage that there should be a straight line from your shoulders, through your hips to your heels is very true. Today we see too many riders with their shoulders too far back and feet too far forward, and as a result the horse's back is being driven down – the exact opposite of where we want a supple and effective horse's back to go!

Dressage rider's position doesn't need to stray too far from the jumper rider's position. Our demonstration rider shows us the different leg positions here.

The best exercise I have found to get a rider's leg in the correct position is the 2-point! You may think this is not something that dressage people should be doing, as they don't generally need to have their seat leave the saddle for a jump or anything else, however for muscle training and strength it is definitely just as important for a dressage rider as it is for a jumper.

As our demonstration rider shows us here, his inner thigh connects well to the saddle, which allows the rider's weight to fall freely down through to his foot. Note his heel is not 'jammed' down; rather, it is as though he is standing on the ground with a flat foot. The heels, hips, and shoulders should all be in a vertical line. Because of this relaxed leg, the weight is nicely down through his leg, which in turn leaves him free to be dexterous with his feet to control how much spur he may or may not wish to use.

This brings us back to our original premise of the core muscles. If a rider's knee is open or not connected to the saddle, or even if the leg is too far forward or backward, the core muscles are disengaged. That is to say, the foundation of the rider's strength and balance is compromised. As a rider heading towards a fence, the last thing you want is for your horse to root you up out of the tack. With the leg solidly situated beneath the rider, and the core muscles engaged, the rider is able to stay more in balance and together with his horse.