

The Vowel Method of Applied Pressure in Horse Training

By Bob Jeffreys

All horse training involves the application of pressure to request a desired response. Whew! What a sentence! What we mean here is we have to do something in order to get something from our horse. What we do could be kissing or clucking to make him move, pushing him to the right or left with our leg, or using our seat and reins to get him to stop. When the response is achieved, the pressure should be removed, telling the horse that he did the right thing. Again, if we cluck and he moves, we stop clucking. If we push with our leg and he moves over, we stop pushing; if we engage our seat and start to pick up our reins and he stops, we release both cues.

Most horse people realize this and practice it to one degree or another. It is the amount of initial pressure to be applied that is confusing to some, and it is here that the Vowel Method of Applied Pressure™ comes into play.

Simply put, we should use as little pressure as possible, but as much as is needed. **A.E.I.O.U.**, in this instance, stands for

Ask,
Encourage,
Insist,
Oder, and
Undo.

Always start with an **ASK**, and always end with the **UNDO**. What you need in between the two is determined by your horse.

Although it is initially important to praise your horse when he gets something right, remember that too much praise can actually become a distraction, because horses are not motivated so much by kind words ("attaboy's"), treats, or even a good rub. These are things we desire; horses want safety, comfort, and consistency in our application and release of pressure. This results in clear requests, and clear thank you's for performing, and horses love clarity. They will even, in time, learn to draw their own consistency from us.

Let's use the example of teaching the horse to move away from the pressure of our hand. Start by standing in front of your horse, facing him, and place a hand on the bridge of his nose. Add just a tad of pressure to **ASK** him to back away. If he doesn't move within two seconds, increase the amount of your pushing pressure, but only slightly. This would be the **ENCOURAGE** phase, and again you'll give him two seconds to respond. If he still doesn't back, increase your pressure just a bit more, to **INSIST** that he back away. If, at any point, he backs away, release, or **UNDO**, your pressure, and pet your horse. However, if he still doesn't move within these next two seconds, you can increase your pressure even more, to whatever it takes to **ORDER** him to back up. **UNDO**, or release all pressure, when he complies.

Begin again, but begin at the **ASK** pressure level, and wait two seconds before proceeding to the **ENCOURAGE** level, etc. In this way you are giving your horse the chance to become lighter, and respond to the lower amount of pressure, which, of course, is our end goal. Never assume you must get to a particular stage before the horse will move. He'll get better and better as he begins to understand what you want, and eventually will respond when you simply **ASK**.

You can use this method, not only with your hands, but with a lead rope, reins, leg cues, and with some minor variations, just about everything else. So, whether you're on the ground, or in the saddle, remember your vowels!