

# Shoulder Control

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To get the best performance from our mules it is important to talk to and move each body part as needed. A mule's shoulder is one of the most important body parts of a mule.

If you are walking through a gate and your mule crowds into your space, wouldn't it be great to ask your mule to move his shoulder away from you and leave your space.

How about when you are loping a circle and your mule drops his inside shoulder or "falls into the circle"? With control of the shoulder, you can ask the mule to pickup and move the shoulder to the outside of the circle.

By teaching the mule to move his shoulder we are also making it easier to teach our mule to side pass. All of this, and so much more, can be accomplished when you teach your mule shoulder control.



**From the saddle, you can teach your mule to be soft and responsive with shoulder control**

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**Adding pressure to the left rein toward the point of the shoulder will tell Angel to step outside the circle with her right front foot**

I'll start the lesson on the ground, but you can start this lesson on the ground or in the saddle. Anytime we work with a mule on the ground you should be thinking about being in the saddle, because anything we teach on the ground will transfer to the saddle when we ride.

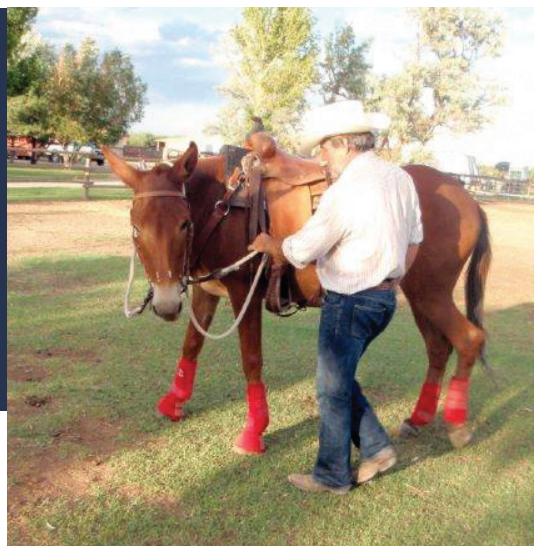
We must also understand that every mule owner is a trainer, whether we want to be or not. Anytime we are around our mule we are training them. Therefore, we as our mule's trainer must adapt our lesson plan to fit us and our mule.

As with any lesson we are teaching a mule, we will start in an environment that is safe for the mule and the mule stays calm. Remember: "Ride where you can, not where you can't."

With a bridle and full-cheek snaffle bit on your mule, ask him to move forward by cueing his hip. If your mule stops do not punish your mule, just ask him to move forward again.

Before we begin the lesson, look at the mule's neck and where it "connects" to his shoulder. When our mule turns, we often see a crease between the neck and shoulder. Just below this crease on the mule's shoulder is the "point" of the shoulder. Often the shoulder bone's point.

Once your mule is moving forward consistently around you in a small circle at the walk, slowly apply pressure to one rein by adding pressure towards



**Repetition of the exercise from the ground is the best way to teach your mule to respond to the cue from the ground**

the point of the mule's shoulder and ask the mule to give to the bit. When the mule gives to the bit, he should tip his nose to the side that pressure was applied. The mule should continue walking as he gives to the pressure. If the mule stops his feet ask him to move forward.

Remember, when a mule gives to the bit, there is zero pressure on the rein. The mule will hold his head off to the side until you ask him to straighten his head and stop giving.

Often times when we begin teaching this lesson, the release from the mule is going to be very minimal. So, a suggestion is... if you are not sure if the mule gave or not, it is better to release early rather than continue to hold and hope you get it right. If you hold too long the mule will begin getting "heavier" in the mouth. But, if you give the mule the benefit of the doubt and release when you think he is giving, you will be heading in the right direction and get there sooner rather than later.

Once your mule is giving to the bit consistently we will start step two of the lesson.

With the mule walking calmly and giving, let's say from the left, we now want to take our rein and move it as though we are pushing the shoulder away from us. We do not touch the mule with the rein, rather we want to move the rein towards the mule's neck,



asking the mule to step away from us and “outside” the small circle we are in. When your mule does this, release the rein. The mule has just moved his shoulder to the right.

Repeat this exercise, one step at a time, until he constantly takes one step when you cue the mule.

As you ride, concentrate on the mule’s shoulder and feet and ask the mule to step outside the circle you are riding in. If you ask the mule to move his shoulder just as he is picking up his foot, he will move the shoulder easier. Essentially, it is easier for the mule to move a shoulder with no weight on it than a shoulder with the weight of his body on it. Soon you will be able to add pressure to the left rein and move the right front foot (or inside shoulder) to the outside of your circle.

When you ask the mule to move his shoulder one step and he responds 100% of the time, ask for two steps, then three steps outside the circle, and so on.

After your mule responds to your cues and you can move his shoulder consistently from the ground, ask the mule to move his shoulder while you are in the saddle. You will use the same cues in the saddle that you used from the ground.

Like all lessons you teach your mule, you will need to work on both sides of the mule. Remember a mule cannot respond to a soft cue if you ask with a hard or jerky rein. You can always add more pressure to your cue if the mule does not respond, but you must start with a soft cue.

With lots of practice, many repetitions and you giving very light cues, you will be able to move the mule’s shoulder by moving the rein one inch towards the mule’s neck with a loose rein. You will pickup each of the mule’s front feet and move his shoulder anywhere you wish.

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