



Head Down Cue

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The Head Down Cue teaches a mule to accept handling of his head and ears in any situation. Whether it be to put on a bridle, halter, or even in a sticky situation when a mule or you might be in danger. It also teaches a mule to lower his head on cue by softening and bending his neck to lower his head. You will be able to ask a mule to put his head in any position you need, when you need.

A mule often puts his head in the air when he is uncomfortable. For whatever reason, he is telling us there is something he does not like. We have all seen a rider trying to put a bridle on a mule with the mule's head straight up in the air. Wouldn't it be easier to bridle a mule with his head at a comfortable level for us? Of course it would.

Over time the Head Down Cue will relax and soften the mule's neck muscles, and will also teach our mule to relax and be more willing to be handled around his head, ears, eyes and mouth.

This lesson also teaches the mule to give to pressure. Every mule should be taught to give to pressure. When a mule has learned to give to pressure the mule will not set back when tied, will lower his head when he steps on the lead rope or rein and many, many other things.

Our goal is to be able to touch the mule's head, ears and neck without any resistant. If you cannot touch the mule's head, ears or neck, you will need to sack out the mule's head, ears and neck first before you begin the lesson.

The Lesson

There are several ways to teach the Head Down Cue and I will explain a couple of them to you. Be sure to choose the best one for you and your mule. Make sure that you work with your mule in a safe area.

(left) Apply two pounds of pressure on the lead rope
(right) Place your hand on the mule's pole until the mule moves his head downward

The first way you can teach the Head Down Cue is with a lead rope and your hand.

Place a correctly fitted halter on the mule with a leadrope attached. Standing at the mule's left side; hold the leadrope in your hand about one foot under the halter and the mule's head. Hold the excess lead rope in your right hand.

Apply downward pressure with your left hand, about two pounds of pressure. The second the mule drops his head downward, release the pressure on the lead rope. The initial drop of your mule's head may not be a big drop, so be sure to look for the smallest movement downward of your mule's head. This will be your starting point. From there you can begin to ask your mule to drop his head more; but you have to start somewhere.

Remember, the mule learns from the release of pressure, not by adding pressure. Should the mule raise his head, keep applying two pounds of pressure until the mule drops his head.

Let's say the mule is standing with his head four feet from the ground. As you apply two pounds of pressure, the mule raises his head to five feet from the ground. Keep applying two pounds of pressure until the mule drops his head to four feet 11 ½ inches. Do not hold the pressure until the mule drops his head to 3 feet 11 ½ inches, the original height. The mule is not ready for that yet. Once the mule had learned the cue you can hold the pressure until the mule places his head at the height you want.

Remember, to start you will release pressure on ANY downward movement.

To put it in perspective, the mule can and may move his head in four directions, up, down right and left. Only release pressure after downward movement. If your mule moves his head left, do not release, only when he moves his head down.

Be patient and hold pressure as long as it takes until you



(left to right) Stand on the lead rope with light pressure • Work with the mule until he will take his head to the ground • Next, apply downward pressure to one rein. Always remember to work both sides of the mule

get a downward movement of the mule's head. Release the pressure and praise the mule by rubbing his neck. This will reassure the mule that it got the right answer and make the mule want to try even harder the next time.

Wait a minute or so, then apply downward pressure again, asking the mule to lower his head. Give the mule at least two to three seconds between requests to allow the mule to absorb the lesson.

If the mule takes his head back up each time you release, ask him to lower his head right away again. If the mule lowers his head and leaves his head down, allow the mule to stand and rest.

If you apply two pounds of pressure and after a while the mule does not respond, you can add more pressure, making sure you give the mule time to respond.

Our goal is to have the mule respond to light pressure, so we must always start with light pressure and give the mule time to respond.

Ask Your Mule To Leave His Head Low

Next, we will ask the mule to leave his head at the lower level. We will work in small increments until you have the mule touch his nose to the ground.

Note: Do not ride the mule with his nose on the ground. This is an unnatural head set for a mule. Many mules will stop and roll on the ground if they are walking with their nose on the ground.

If the mule has his head five feet from the ground, apply downward pressure on the lead rope. When the mule drops his head release the pressure. The most important part of asking your mule to keep his head low is to apply pressure before the mule raises his head again. You will need to be quick with your hand without bumping the mule with the lead rope.

When the mule is holding his head at four foot 11 inches,

ask the mule to hold his head at four foot 10 inches, then four foot nine inches, until the mule is holding his head four foot from the ground. Praise the mule and give him a break.

It is normal for a mule to move his head in big increments up or down. The more you practice this lesson, the more refined your mule will get and the big movements in different directions will disappear.

Practice standing all around the mule's head. Left side, right side and in front of the mule, so the mule will respond to your cue wherever you are.

Another Way To Ask For Head Down Cue

Now, put a bridle with a full check snaffle bit on the mule and apply downward pressure to one rein just like you did with the lead rope.

First use the left rein, then after the mule is responding use the right rein.

When the mule is responding with each rein individually, apply downward pressure to both reins at the same time and ask the mule to drop his head.

We are now teaching the mule to drop his head using one or two reins. This will allow us to later ask the mule to drop his head and calm down from the saddle while we are riding the mule. This is called the Calm Down Cue.

Third Way To Teach The Head Down Cue

Next, we will teach the mule to lower his head using our hand. Place your hand between the mule's ears on the mule's poll. Release pressure, remove your hand when the mule moves his head downward. Watch the tip of the mule's ear. When the tip of the ear moves down 1/8 of an inch, release the pressure.

Keep working with your hand on the mule's poll, just like you did with the lead rope and reins, until you can get the mule to lower his head to the ground.

We want the mule to give to pressure should he step on the

lead rope or reins.

Start with a halter and lead rope on the mule. Stand on the lead rope with your foot, applying two pounds of pressure. Make sure you are holding the loose end of the lead rope in your hand.

If the mule raises his head allow the rope to slide under your foot, still maintaining two pounds of pressure, until the mule moves his head downward towards the pressure. You are not looking for the mule to take his head to the ground. That will come with practice.

Keep working with the mule until he will lower his head when you step on the lead rope with the lightest pressure. Then continue until you can get the mule's head next to the

ground.

You should practice these lessons with hundreds of repetitions until this cue becomes a demand cue. A demand cue is when you give the cue to the mule and he responds immediately without thinking.

After completing the Head Down Cue lessons you will have several ways to ask your mule to drop his head and calm down.



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