

How to MEMORIZE a show pattern

by Lindsay Grice, Equine Canada coach and judge

Use coloured markers to illustrate various gaits and transitions.

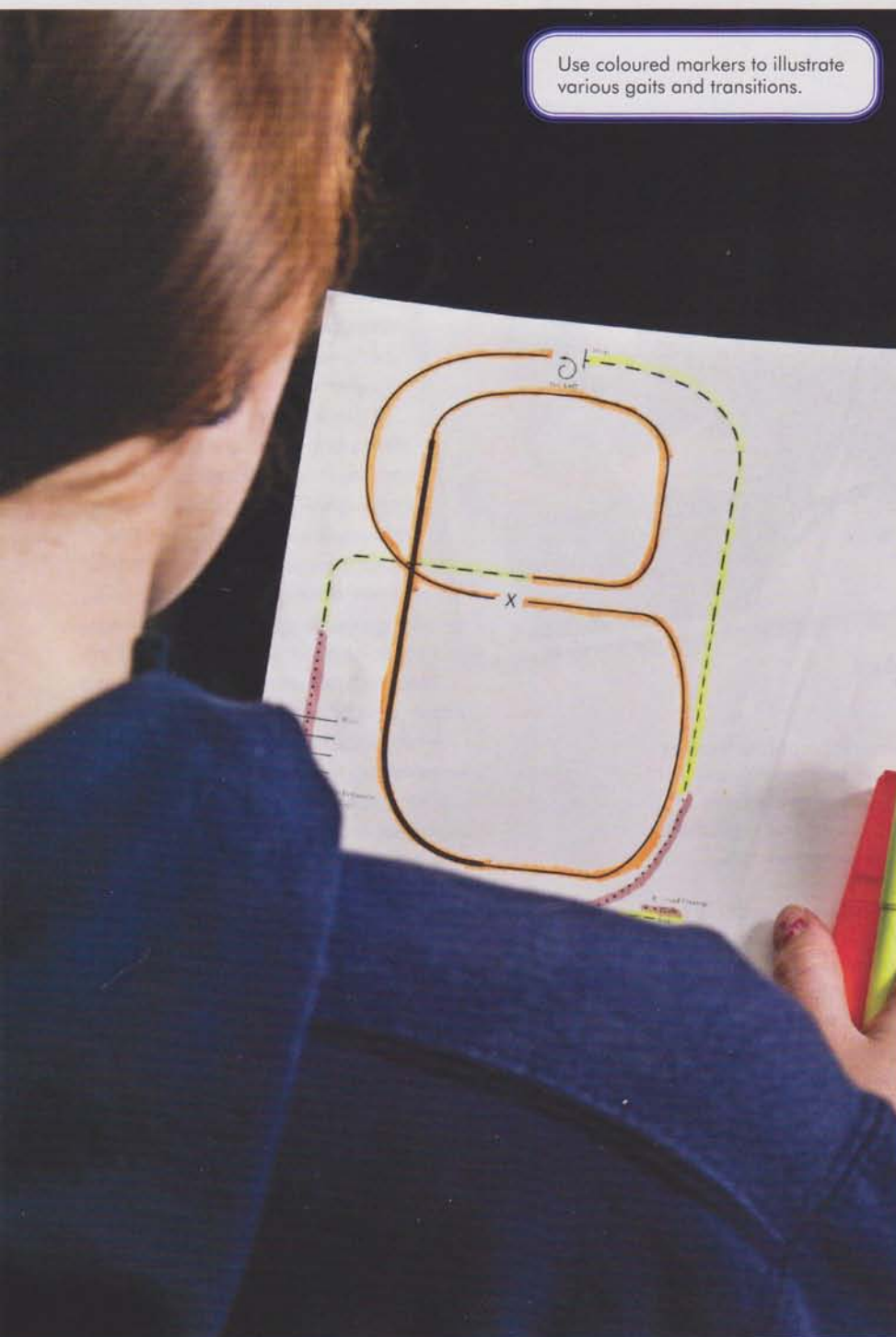
As a judge, I hate to be the “off course” whistle-blower. As a competitor, I hate to hear it. Because I was the “off course queen” as a young rider, I know well that lost-in-the-jungle feeling when you don’t know where to go after an obstacle. I want to spare others the red face (and wasted entry fees) I experienced, and share some pattern memorization tips I found helpful. Everyone memorizes material in a different way:

- **Visual learners** grasp concepts through diagrams and demonstrations. Using colours and shapes will imprint a picture of the material in the mind’s eye.
- **Auditory learners** understand by listening and repeating the information back. They respond to descriptions, changes in tone, rhythms and rhymes.
- **Kinesthetic learners** assimilate through movement and experience; i.e. learning by doing.

Knowing your learning style is helpful. Try a few memorization exercises in each of these categories and see what works best. I’ll give you a few suggestions:

Memorize the middle. Often, we get the first part of a pattern, poem or song down, but get stuck in the middle of the second verse. Start at the middle rather than rehearsing from the beginning over and over. Get to the point where you can start at obstacle three or five and pick it up from there.

Rhyme it. Song, rhyme, or alliteration (starting each word with the same letter) appeals to auditory learners. For example: “Lope left after logs” or “Extend to the top, collect to the stop and turn on the fore beside the door.” Speak out pattern manoeuvres in segments, like phrases in a paragraph. For example: “Jog, extended jog, stop, spin.”





You can also group obstacles in clusters of three, repeating each cluster with changes of tone. “Gate (quiet), left lead logs (loud), right lead logs (loud), stop in box! (abrupt).” You can do the same thing with a sequence of jumps, dressage test or elements of an equitation pattern.

Use colour. On your course diagram, use coloured markers to illustrate various gaits and transitions. This works well for equitation and horsemanship patterns, trail, western riding or reining patterns and jumping courses. Perhaps green will remind you to go faster, like a traffic light (i.e. pick up a lope.) Red might indicate the stops.

Another suggestion is to colour the first section of jumps on the right lead red (red equals right) and the next section in yellow (lemon equals left).

See shapes in the course and give word pictures to the obstacles based on their shape. For instance, you might see the first segment as a question mark, the next grouping as a zig-zag, followed by a letter J.

Where next? Visualize exiting each obstacle and turning toward the next one. I remind my students to silently say the words “what’s next?” as they’re crossing each element to get their minds always assertively thinking ahead. I used to fall into the trap of jumping a fence, thinking about it while jumping it

and on the following strides. By the time you’re landing from a jump or exiting an obstacle, it’s too late to analyze it. Forget it, pitch your thoughts to the next destination and leave the assessment until later.

Walk it. I encourage students to set up pylons in a mini-pattern at the stable area or beside the trailer and walk through patterns on foot. Jumper and trail riders are invited walk the actual course before the class. Or use sticks on the ground to set up a mini course. Actually putting yourself into the situation appeals to kinesthetic learners.

Put it in perspective. When memorizing a pattern, imagine where the in-gate is. Where are the judges sitting? Mentally put yourself in the ring. If possible, watch the competitors in the class before you, preferably from a few different locations at ringside – not just the gate. By all means, get into the ring and ride or walk around the obstacles if show management permits.

Give yourself time. If possible, pick up your pattern the day before your class – don’t cram. The more hurried you get, the more you’ll forget!

And, who knows? It might not hurt to slip that course diagram under your pillow the night before... 🐾

Set up pylons in a mini-pattern and walk it out. Learning by doing appeals to kinesthetic learners.