

The Reader Toolkit

Thirteen printable worksheets from Hard Truths, Soft Hands

Throughout the book I ask you to write things down. Your horse's normal temperature. What you saw on a barn visit. The questions to ask a seller before you fall in love with the wrong horse.

Those things are more useful on a page you can carry to the barn than in a book you have to keep flipping through, so they are all collected here. Print them as many times as you need. Keep a set in the trailer. Hand one to a friend who is horse shopping.

You already bought the book. You should not have to buy anything else to use what is in it.

The sheets are ordered to follow the book. Each one names the chapter it belongs to, so it still makes sense on its own.

What Is In Here

Ordered by chapter, the way you meet them in the book.

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1 worksheet

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Barn Visit Evaluation

Chapter 2

Take this with you. Fill it in while you are standing there, not from memory in the car afterward.

Facility _____

Date and time of visit _____

WHAT YOU CAN SEE

- ☐ Stalls are clean and dry, bedded deep enough that horses are not standing on a thin layer
- ☐ Water buckets and troughs are clean, not just full
- ☐ Hay is stored dry and looks and smells good
- ☐ Fencing is sound, with no loose wire, broken boards, or protruding hardware
- ☐ Turnout areas have footing, shade, and enough space for the number of horses in them
- ☐ The horses in residence look well fed and content
- ☐ Aisles and tack areas are tidy enough to be safe

TURNOUT POLICY — ASK DIRECTLY

Hours per day _____

Alone or with companions _____

What happens in bad weather _____

Is there an extra charge _____

FIT FOR YOU

- ☐ The program matches where I actually am as a rider, not where I hope to be
- ☐ Showing expectations match my goals, my schedule, and my budget
- ☐ Lesson structure and frequency work with my real life
- ☐ I understand what happens when the trainer travels or is away
- ☐ I understand what the trainer expects of me as a client
- ☐ Questions are welcomed here rather than tolerated

THE FEEL OF THE PLACE

Culture is harder to measure than footing and matters more than most people realise. Write down what you noticed, including anything you cannot quite name.

Red Flags When Choosing a Barn

Chapter 2

None of these alone means walk away. Several together mean slow down and ask harder questions.

Barn _____

Date visited _____

WHAT THE BOARD PRICE ACTUALLY COVERS

Ask for this line by line, and get the answer in writing. The advertised number is rarely the number you pay.

Item	Included in board?	If extra, how much
Turnout	_____	_____
Grain, and which one	_____	_____
Hay, and how much per day	_____	_____
Blanketing	_____	_____
Holding for vet or farrier	_____	_____
Fans, heaters, or fly spray systems	_____	_____
Medication or supplement administration	_____	_____
Arena or trailer parking fees	_____	_____

WHO IS GIVING MEDICAL OPINIONS

- ☐ Someone without veterinary credentials interprets radiographs, PPE results, or diagnoses
- ☐ The barn owner or trainer also buys and sells horses
- ☐ Boarders describe running decisions past the barn owner rather than their own veterinarian
- ☐ A horse you own or are considering is run down by someone who did not sell him to you

WHO IS ALLOWED TO TOUCH YOUR HORSE

- ☐ You cannot use your own veterinarian
- ☐ You cannot use your own farrier
- ☐ Vendor restrictions are stated as policy, but no written insurance requirement can be produced
- ☐ The barn holds categorical positions on modalities and enforces them on horses that are not theirs

WHAT THE LONGEST-STANDING STUDENTS CAN DO

- ☐ An owner who has been here for years cannot tack up her own horse
- ☐ A rider several years in cannot tell you which lead she picked up
- ☐ A rider does not notice she is sitting on the wrong diagonal
- ☐ Basic horsemanship is done for the riders rather than by them
- ☐ Students cannot explain why they are doing what they are doing

Red Flags When Choosing a Barn

Chapter 2

None of these alone means walk away. Several together mean slow down and ask harder questions.

HOW RIDERS ARE MOVED UP

- ☐ Readiness is described in terms of jump height rather than fundamentals
- ☐ Riders are jumping courses they cannot yet see distances to or adjust the canter within
- ☐ A rider cannot reliably stop or steer her horse on a hack without a trainer present
- ☐ You have watched riders from this program get hurt, and the falls looked predictable
- ☐ Pressure to move up comes from the program rather than from the rider or her parents

HOW THE BARN HANDLES INFORMATION

- ☐ Rules are justified by a story rather than a reason
- ☐ Nobody can tell you why a required practice exists
- ☐ Questions are met with defensiveness rather than an answer
- ☐ Your instinct is that people here have stopped asking

A barn that cannot tell you why a rule exists is a barn that will hand you the next wrong thing with exactly the same confidence.

WHY I AM ACTUALLY CONSIDERING THIS BARN

Proximity, price, and the people your family already loves are real reasons. Name them, then write down what you are accepting in exchange.

I am choosing this barn because

WHAT I AM ACCEPTING IN EXCHANGE

Some lists are worth it. A list with a safety item on it is not.

Questions for a Prospective Trainer

Chapter 2

A trainer who welcomes these questions is telling you something. So is one who does not.

Trainer _____

Date _____

THEIR PROGRAM

What level of rider does your program serve best, and where would I fit in it?

How is a typical lesson structured, and how often would you expect me to ride?

What are your showing expectations, and what does a show season cost with you?

WHEN YOU ARE NOT THERE

How often do you travel, and who teaches and oversees the horses when you are away?

WHAT YOU EXPECT OF ME

What do you expect from a client beyond showing up for lessons and paying the bill?

HOW YOU WORK

How do you prefer a client to raise a concern about their horse or their progress?

How do you decide when a horse and rider are not the right match, and how do you handle that conversation?

MY IMPRESSIONS

The Four Pillars of Readiness

Chapter 3

Answer these honestly. Hopeful answers will not be useful here.

Some of your pillars will be solid and some will need work. That is normal and expected. Finding the gaps now, before a horse depends on you, is the entire point.

PILLAR ONE — TIME

Not the best-case version of your schedule. The actual one.

How many days a week can you realistically get to the barn, and what can those days actually look like?

What happens to your horse's care if your job changes, if you travel, or if you have a health issue?

PILLAR TWO — MONEY

Real numbers from your own area, not national averages.

Do you know every line item in the monthly cost at the facility you are considering, including everything not covered in base board?

What is the maximum unexpected expense you could absorb before financial stress starts influencing decisions about your horse's care?

PILLAR THREE — EXPERIENCE

Not how many years you have ridden. What you can do independently when things do not go to plan.

What is the most challenging riding situation you have navigated on your own, without your instructor stepping in?

Is the horse you are considering matched to where you actually are, or to the rider you are hoping to become?

The Four Pillars of Readiness

Answer these honestly. Hopeful answers will not be useful here.

PILLAR FOUR — SUPPORT SYSTEM

The relationships that cannot be built in an emergency.

Do you have, or are you actively building, a relationship with a veterinarian who will know your horse before something goes wrong?

Do you have a trainer who tells you the difficult truths alongside the encouraging ones?

WHERE I ACTUALLY STAND

Pillar	Solid	Needs work	What I will do about it, and by when
Time			
Money			
Experience			
Support system			

The people who succeed with horses are not the ones who had everything perfectly lined up before they started. They are the ones who knew where they were strong, where they needed to grow, and moved forward with preparation rather than hope.

Horse Evaluation Sheet

Chapter 5

One page per horse. Fill it in during the visit, while the details are still accurate.

THE HORSE

Barn name	_____	Registered name	_____
Age	_____	Breed	_____
Height	_____	Sex	_____
Asking price	_____	Location	_____
Seller	_____	Phone	_____

WATCH HIM BEFORE HE KNOWS YOU ARE WATCHING

How he behaves simply being a horse tells you more than how he behaves when he is being presented for sale.

ON THE GROUND

- ☐ Catches, leads, ties, and stands quietly
- ☐ Comfortable being groomed all over, including under the belly and along the back
- ☐ Picks up all four feet without a fight
- ☐ Reasonable about clipping, bathing, and the farrier, per the seller
- ☐ Loads and hauls, per the seller

UNDER SADDLE

How he felt at walk, trot, canter _____

What happened when something went wrong _____

Anything that felt off, even slightly _____

WHAT THE SELLER TOLD ME

Vet and farrier, with contact details _____

Last shod / Coggins / dental _____

Quirks and challenges named by the seller _____

MY TRAINER'S READ

Red Flags When Buying

Chapter 5

None of these alone means walk away. Several together mean slow down and ask harder questions.

AT THE LISTING STAGE

- ☐ Described as suitable for any level. Horses are suitable for a specific range, and a seller who knows their horse knows this
- ☐ A price that has dropped significantly and repeatedly in a short time, with no explanation offered
- ☐ Only a few photos, all from the same angle or the same session
- ☐ Vague or missing information about age, height, training, or show record

DURING THE VISIT

- ☐ The horse was worked hard before you arrived, or is inexplicably quiet for his age and type in a new situation
- ☐ Ears pinned consistently during grooming, tacking, or girthing
- ☐ The seller cannot give specific answers about the horse's quirks and challenges
- ☐ His behaviour shifts significantly between your first and second visit
- ☐ You are discouraged from watching him being caught, brought in, or turned out

FROM THE SELLER

- ☐ Manufactured urgency — other people are coming, you need to decide today
- ☐ Cannot tell you who the horse's regular vet and farrier are
- ☐ Vague about when he was last shod, or when his last Coggins was pulled
- ☐ Offers a discount to skip the pre-purchase exam
- ☐ Details change between conversations in ways a memory lapse does not explain

A sound horse with a clean history can withstand a pre-purchase exam. When someone is motivated to avoid that examination, ask yourself what they are motivated to avoid.

WHAT I SAW, AND WHAT I ASKED ABOUT IT

The Paper Trail

Chapter 6

Get it in writing, keep it in one place, and have your trainer review anything before you sign it.

Horse _____

Date of sale or lease _____

IN THE BILL OF SALE

- ☐ Full legal names and contact information for both buyer and seller
- ☐ Description of the horse: registered name, barn name, breed, colour, markings, age
- ☐ Registration or USEF numbers, if applicable
- ☐ Purchase price and form of payment
- ☐ Date of the transaction
- ☐ A statement that the seller has legal right to sell, free and clear of liens or encumbrances
- ☐ Signatures of both parties

COLLECT AND KEEP

- ☐ Pre-purchase exam report, and the radiographs themselves
- ☐ Current Coggins test
- ☐ Vaccination and deworming history
- ☐ Dental records
- ☐ Farrier history and any therapeutic shoeing notes
- ☐ Registration papers and transfer paperwork
- ☐ Insurance policy and binder
- ☐ Any written health disclosures made by the seller

IF THIS IS A LEASE

- ☐ Term, cost, and what the fee covers
- ☐ Who pays for routine care, and who pays when something goes wrong
- ☐ Insurance requirements and who holds the policy
- ☐ Where the horse lives, and who decides if that changes
- ☐ How the lease ends early, on either side
- ☐ First right of refusal, if it applies

The cost of clarity at the beginning is always less than the cost of confusion afterward.

Daily Observation Log

Baseline is built by showing up and noticing. This is where the noticing gets written down.

Horse

Month

You will not know what is abnormal until you know what is normal for this specific horse.

[illegible]

Write it down on the day, not from memory a week later.

Know Your Horse's Normal

Vital signs baseline card — record what is normal for your horse, on a day when nothing is wrong.

Take these on a quiet day, at rest, in the shade. Not after a ride, and not when you are already worried about him. That reading is your reference point for every day that follows.

YOUR HORSE

Name _____

Age _____

THE NUMBERS

Vital sign	Normal range at rest	Call your vet when	MY HORSE
Temperature	99 to 101.5 F	101.5 to 102.5 is mild. Call at 103 or above.	_____
Pulse	28 to 44 beats per minute	Over 60 at rest is a problem.	_____
Respiration	8 to 16 breaths per minute	Elevated at rest, or laboured.	_____
Gut sounds	Gurgling in all four quadrants	Silent or greatly reduced.	_____
Capillary refill	2 seconds or less	Over 2 seconds, or pale gums.	_____
Mucous membranes	Pink and moist	Pale, white, grey, blue, or tacky.	_____

DATE TAKEN

Baseline recorded on _____

Rechecked on _____

HOW TO TAKE THEM

Pulse: the digital artery along the pastern, or at the jaw. Respiration: watch the flank rise and fall for 30 seconds and double it. Gut sounds: listen against the flank on both sides, high and low. Capillary refill: press the gum firmly for two seconds, release, and count how long the colour takes to return.

101.2 means one thing on a horse who runs 99.8, and something else on a horse who has always sat at 101.

When to Call the Vet

Chapter 10

Three levels of urgency. When you are uncertain, call — a two-minute phone call is almost always the right choice.

CALL IMMEDIATELY — do not wait for morning, do not watch overnight

- Signs of colic that do not resolve within 30 minutes, or that are worsening
- Non-weight-bearing lameness
- A wound that is deep, near a joint, or actively bleeding and not controllable
- Eye injury, or sudden cloudiness, discharge, or squinting
- Difficulty breathing
- A temperature above 103 degrees
- Collapse, or inability to rise
- Any suspected neurological signs such as stumbling, incoordination, or head tilt

And any situation where your gut tells you something is seriously wrong. Trust that instinct.

CALL DURING BUSINESS HOURS and schedule an evaluation

- Mild, consistent lameness without obvious cause, persisting more than 24 to 48 hours
- A new lump, bump, or swelling that is not hot and not causing lameness
- Skin conditions or coat changes you cannot identify
- Gradual weight loss over days or weeks
- Changes in manure consistency that persist more than a day
- Any behavioural change you cannot attribute to a training or management cause

WATCH AND MONITOR

- Very mild intermittent lameness in a horse who is otherwise bright, alert, eating and drinking normally, with no heat or swelling, that you can reasonably attribute to a specific cause such as a hard workout or uneven footing

With the understanding that it should improve, not worsen, over the next 24 hours.

The question to ask is not whether you can afford to wait. It is whether the horse can.

HAVE THIS READY BEFORE YOU DIAL

Your veterinarian will ask for all of it. Writing it down while you wait for the callback keeps you useful instead of frantic.

- ☐ The time you first noticed something was wrong
- ☐ Vital signs, if you can safely take them
- ☐ What he last ate, and when
- ☐ Manure output over the last 24 hours, and whether it looks normal
- ☐ Water intake, and whether the bucket or trough is down
- ☐ Any medication given, and at what time
- ☐ What has changed recently: feed, turnout, workload, a new horse, a move

Emergency Contact Card

Chapter 10

Fill this in now. Print it, and put a copy in the barn, in the trailer, and in your phone case.

These are questions to answer before you need the answers, not while you are driving to the barn at midnight.

VETERINARY

Primary vet	
Practice phone	
After-hours line	
Nearest equine hospital	
Hospital phone	
Drive time to hospital	

FARRIER AND SUPPORT

Farrier	
Trainer	
Barn manager	
Barn address	

TRANSPORT

Who can haul, and their phone	
Backup hauler	

IF I CANNOT BE REACHED

Authorised to call the vet on my behalf	
Treatment authorised up to	
Insurance policy number	

Equine First Aid Kit

Chapter 10

Assemble it once, know where it lives, and check it twice a year to replace what has been used or expired.

A first aid kit is not a substitute for veterinary care. It is how you manage a situation while help is on the way.

MEASURING AND MONITORING

- ☐ Digital rectal thermometer, with a string attached
- ☐ Stethoscope
- ☐ Watch, for counting heart rate and respiration
- ☐ Flashlight, with working batteries
- ☐ Notebook and pen, for recording vital signs and symptoms

WOUND CARE

- ☐ Clean bandaging materials: standing wraps, gauze, self-adhesive bandage
- ☐ Wound wash
- ☐ Betadine or chlorhexidine solution or scrub
- ☐ Wound ointment or antimicrobial dressing — ask your vet which they prefer for your horse
- ☐ Latex gloves

HOOF AND LIMB

- ☐ Hoof pick
- ☐ Leg ice boots, or a bucket for cold hosing

ADD YOUR OWN

CHECKED

Last checked

Next check due

Know where the kit is. Know what is in it. A kit nobody can find at 11 at night is not a kit.

What This Actually Costs

Chapter 11

Use real quotes from your own area. National averages will not tell you what you need to know.

Facility _____

Date prepared _____

EVERY MONTH

Item	What it covers	Monthly	Annual
Board	Housing, feeding, turnout, daily care	_____	_____
Farrier	Every 6 to 8 weeks	_____	_____
Lessons	Per week or per month	_____	_____
Supplements	Only what your vet agrees is needed	_____	_____
Insurance	Mortality, major medical, or both	_____	_____
Extra turnout or services	Anything outside base board	_____	_____

EVERY YEAR

Item	Notes	Annual
Routine veterinary	Wellness exam, spring and fall vaccines, Coggins	_____
Dental float	Usually annual	_____
Deworming	Per fecal testing	_____
Tack, equipment, blankets	Replacement and repair	_____
Saddle fitting	Independent fitter, not brand-affiliated	_____
Shows and hauling	Entries, stabling, fuel, coaching	_____

THE ONE NOBODY BUDGETS FOR

Something will go wrong. A reserve kept separate from your general savings is what keeps a bad week from becoming a decision about your horse's care.

Emergency reserve target _____

Currently set aside _____

TOTALS

Total monthly _____

Total annual _____

Largest single expense I could absorb today _____