

The Pony Club Guidelines on noseband tightness and height

Noseband tightness

There is growing evidence that tight nosebands are unpleasant and damaging to horses. Tight nosebands:

- Exert high pressure on sensitive tissues, including muscles, blood vessels, and nerves.
- Compress the cheeks against the teeth.
- Increase the risk of mouth injury.
- Make it difficult for the horse to swallow, lick, and chew.
- May be associated with damage to the bones of the head.
- Increase stress.

Tight nosebands may also mask pain, discomfort, and poor training.

How tight is too tight?

- For all types of noseband, it should be possible to fit two adult fingers between the front of the horse's nose and the noseband (Figure 1).
- It doesn't matter how much space there is between the noseband and the side of the face – because of the shape of horses' heads, it is possible to fit several fingers between the noseband and the face here, even if the noseband is very tight.

How can we be consistent when assessing noseband tightness?

- Adult fingers vary in size, making the '2 finger' rule inconsistent.
- The International Society for Equitation Science (ISES) has solved this problem by developing a gauge that measures noseband tightness (Figure 2).
- If the gauge can be inserted between the front of the horse's nose and the noseband up to the '2 finger' line, it is not too tight (Figure 3).
- The ISES gauge can be purchased from ISES (<https://equitationscience.com/store/taper-gauge>).

What if I don't have a gauge?

- Although using the gauge is ideal, adult fingers can be used to estimate noseband tightness.



Figure 1. Two adult fingers should fit between the front of the nose and the noseband

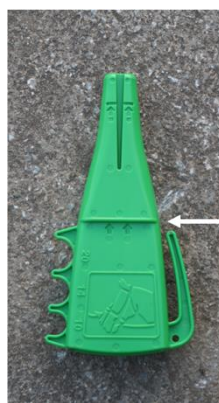


Figure 2. The ISES gauge; the arrow points to the '2 finger' line



Figure 3. The ISES gauge in use

Noseband height

It is important that all nosebands are adjusted to the correct height, to avoid putting pressure on important structures in the horse's head. If incorrectly fitted, nosebands can:

- Create a pressure point just under the facial crest.
- Interfere with the horse's breathing.
- Interfere with the action of the bit.

Cavesson noseband

- There should be at least 1.5–2.0 cm (approximately one finger's width) between the bottom of the facial crest (see Figure 4) and the top of the noseband.

Drop noseband

- The front section should be fitted high enough that it is completely supported by bone on the front of the nose (see Figure 4).
- The back section should sit in the chin groove.

Flash noseband

- The upper strap should be fitted in the same way as a cavesson noseband, the lower strap in the same way as a drop noseband.

Grackle noseband

- The upper strap should sit above the bottom of the facial crest, on the flat part of the cheek.
- The lower strap should sit in the chin groove.
- The central pad should be as high as possible.
- It is not possible to fit a 'traditional' (or 'classic') grackle as recommended – only a Mexican grackle can be fitted in this way.

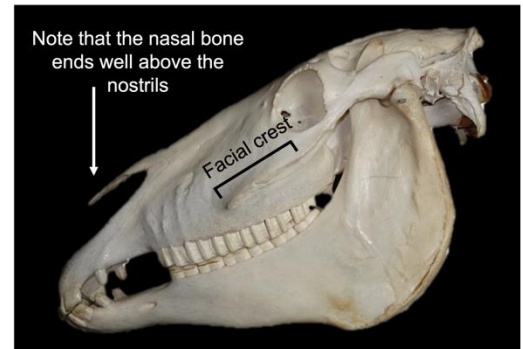


Figure 4. Horse's skull

- **Incorrect noseband fitting is a welfare issue.**
- **Fitting of nosebands in accordance with these recommendations should be encouraged at all Pony Club events, including rallies, competitions, badges, tests and during tack fitting training.**

For more information:

International Society for Equitation Science. [Position on restrictive nosebands \(2019\)](#).

International Society for Equitation Science. ISES Noseband taper gauge ([video](#)).

Society of Master Saddlers. [Fitting a bridle correctly](#).

World Horse Welfare Conference, 2019. Murray, R. '[Don't forget about the bridle! The importance of correct bridle fit.](#)' (Starts at 49 minutes)