



The First 30 Days in the Shooting Horse Discipline

Building Cadence, Confidence, Collection, and Control from Day One

Why This Matters

The first 30 days of training set the tone for everything that follows. Most problems in the Shooting Horse discipline do not begin when pressure increases. They begin much earlier, when the foundation is rushed or assumed instead of built.

This guide is built around the Four C's: Cadence, Confidence, Collection, and Control. Those are not abstract ideas. They are the practical qualities that tell you whether a horse is ready to progress. If they are present, the work becomes clearer and safer. If they are missing, adding more will only expose the weakness.

The goal of the first 30 days is not speed, patterns, or performance. The goal is to establish a horse that stays mentally connected, moves with consistent rhythm, and responds without resistance or confusion.

How to Use This Guide

Each week in this guide represents a focus, not a deadline. Some horses will need more time in one area and less in another. The right pace is the one that protects the horse's understanding and confidence.

Move forward only when your horse is calm, consistent, and repeatable. If something breaks down, that is not failure. It is information. Step back, simplify the work, and rebuild from the last place your horse felt secure.

WEEK 1 — CADENCE (RHYTHM FIRST)

Cadence is the first indicator of understanding, relaxation, and trust. If cadence is inconsistent, nothing built on top of it will stay together for long.

What You're Building

- A steady rhythm at every gait
- Smooth, repeatable transitions
- Forward motion without rushing

What To Do

- Ride straight lines and large circles
- Practice walk, trot, and lope with the same tempo from start to finish
- Focus on transitions that stay quiet and predictable

What To Watch For

- ✓ Horse maintains the same rhythm without constant correction
- ✓ No rushing, hesitation, or abrupt transitions

If It Breaks Down

Loss of cadence is your first warning sign. Slow down, simplify the ride, and restore rhythm before doing anything else.

WEEK 2 — CONFIDENCE (MENTAL STABILITY)

Confidence allows a horse to stay with the rider when the environment changes. Without confidence, pressure creates reaction instead of understanding.

What You're Building

- Trust in your direction
- Calm responses to change
- Willingness instead of tension

What To Do

- Change direction often and ride in different parts of the arena
- Introduce mild, controlled distractions
- Reward softness and mental connection

What To Watch For

- ✓ Horse stays mentally with you when something changes
- ✓ Horse recovers quickly from mistakes or uncertainty

If It Breaks Down

Do not push through a lack of confidence. Simplify the work and return to something your horse already understands.

WEEK 3 — COLLECTION (BALANCE & BODY CONTROL)

Collection is not about creating a frame. It is about balance, body control, and the horse's ability to stay organized while moving.

What You're Building

- Balanced movement
- Shoulder and hip control
- Better quality in turns and transitions

What To Do

- Work on bending, shaping, and basic lateral control
- Keep rhythm while asking the horse to stay more organized
- Make small asks and release often

What To Watch For

- ✓ Horse stays balanced instead of leaning, falling in, or rushing forward
- ✓ Movement feels controlled rather than forced

If It Breaks Down

When balance breaks, go back to cadence. Collection cannot be built on top of tension or confusion.

WEEK 4 — CONTROL (CLEAR COMMUNICATION)

Control is not force—it's clarity.

At this stage, you should be able to guide your horse without resistance or confusion.

What You're Building

- Clear response to aids
- Directional control
- Adjustable speed without tension

What To Do

- Refine steering and stopping
- Introduce simple pattern elements
- Focus on consistency in cues

What To Watch For

- ✓ Horse responds lightly and predictably

✓ You can redirect without a fight

If It Breaks Down

You skipped something.

Go back and fix it.

Final Principle

If you lose cadence, slow down. If you lose confidence, simplify. If you lose collection, rebalance. If you lose control, clarify. That is the training process in its simplest form.

The goal is not to “finish” 30 days. The goal is to build a horse that is consistent, confident, responsive, and ready for what comes next.