

Horses love Positive Reinforcement training (R+), but sometimes their humans have questions!

We've got answers...

Do I always have to reward with food?

The most frequent food rewards come during the teaching (what we call "shaping") of a behavior. For well-established behaviors, **the horse doesn't need to be rewarded every time.** Fading out the treats is a critical element for using R+ under saddle, but it must be done knowledgeably to maintain the horse's willing motivation. Think about how you feel about working hard—you expect and deserve to get paid, but you don't have to have a coin handed to you every minute. On the other hand, if your boss quit paying you entirely, or only paid you with pats on the back, you'd lose your motivation.

Solutions That Work for Every Horse

Horses, like humans, have different personalities and idiosyncrasies. Our **Priority to Positive**[®] skills and principles can help you succeed with any horse or any situation.

What's our secret?

Find out now
by scanning
the QR Code



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Demystifying Positive Reinforcement Horse Training

Via Nova's
Priority to Positive[®]
Approach:
Answering common questions



Bringing Positive Reinforcement Training to the traditional horse world.

I'm a competitor. Can I really use this in competitive disciplines?

Positive Reinforcement can be used to train for competition and horse sports in multiple ways. With our PtP approach, we see endless opportunities. Some examples:

- ✔ Positive Reinforcement **improves communication and builds trust** between the rider and horse, which means the rider has a willing and attentive partner in the competition ring.
- ✔ Rewards, markers, and cues used during training to **improve the horse's movements and performance** can be transferred to light aids under saddle.
- ✔ Positive Reinforcement can **solve problems** that a horse is experiencing in competition—like fear of jumping over water, refusing to enter the arena, or even getting into a trailer to go home!
- ✔ Regular use of Positive Reinforcement training **builds heart and confidence** in horses. The training makes sense to them and gives them a reason to try.
- ✔ Positive Reinforcement has already been **used successfully by Olympic-level riders** such as Bezie Madden to problem-solve and improve communication.

I've heard I shouldn't use any bits, bridles, or aids if I use Positive Reinforcement. Is that true?

No. Of course, you can use R+ with traditional tack and aids. Via Nova's Priority to Positive goal is to use standard riding equipment and aids for safety and to cue behavior—but not as a means to force behavior. **The crucial difference is how these cues are trained and the horse's motivation for responding** to them.



What if my horse is pushy around food and treats? I don't want to encourage that!

This is an important point. Positive Reinforcement doesn't mean giving your horse treats in response to unwanted, pushy behavior. **The first lesson we teach when we start training with Positive Reinforcement is "Manners."** The horses learn right away how to behave around food to receive their reward, and we emphasize that lesson for a lifetime. In our PtP program, we also teach you the mechanical skills of how to handle the treats to discourage pushiness.

Do I have to use a clicker? I can't use a clicker in the show ring.

People often associate Positive Reinforcement with clicker training—it is and isn't. The clicker is a marker that marks the behavior you want to reward (see our "How to Communicate" pamphlet.). But a marker doesn't need to be a clicker; it can be anything that's consistent and distinct enough for the horse to recognize. At Via Nova, we often use the letter "T" as a verbal marker, but it could be a whistle, a unique cluck—or while riding, a touch on the withers. You can choose what marker you want to use as long as it's consistent and conditioned correctly.

Does Positive Reinforcement take longer than traditional training?

As we all know, horses love food. By shaping behavior with markers, food rewards, and clear cues, they can associate their correct behavior with the reward—**creating better communication and speeding up the learning and training process.** With less confusion, they're more likely to perform behaviors that they might have resisted in traditional training. **Positive Reinforcement can yield quick results once foundational behaviors are established.** Like any type of training, the success and time it takes depends on both the trainer's execution and the individual horse.