

Tack & Equipment Study Guide

Definitions

Tack, in a strict definition, refers to the leather equipment, such as saddles and bridles that are used in equine activities. More commonly, the word tack is used to refer to any and all equipment, leather or not, that is used with horses.

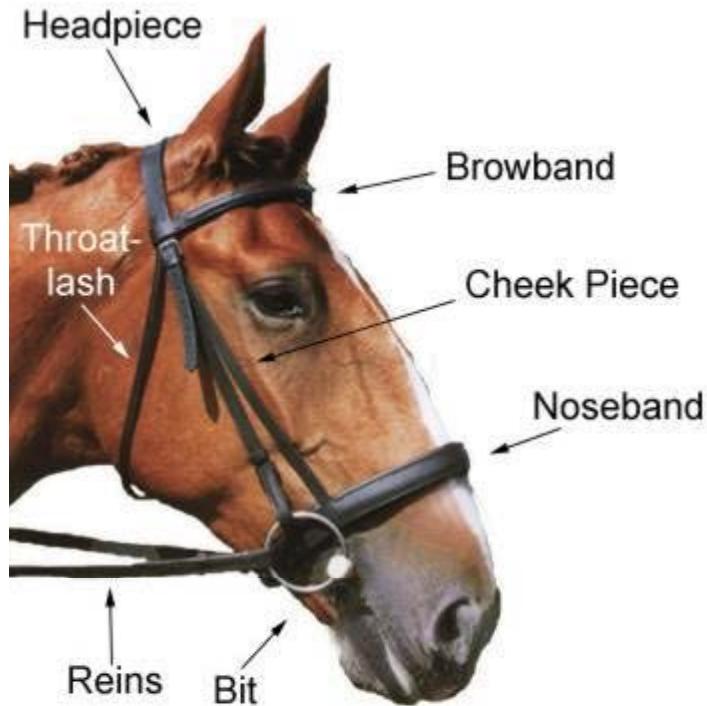
Equipment is sometimes used to refer to items other than the saddle and bridle, such as saddle pads, grooming, and stable supplies.

Types of Tack

The most basic types of tack are bridles, bits, saddles, saddle pads, and other types.

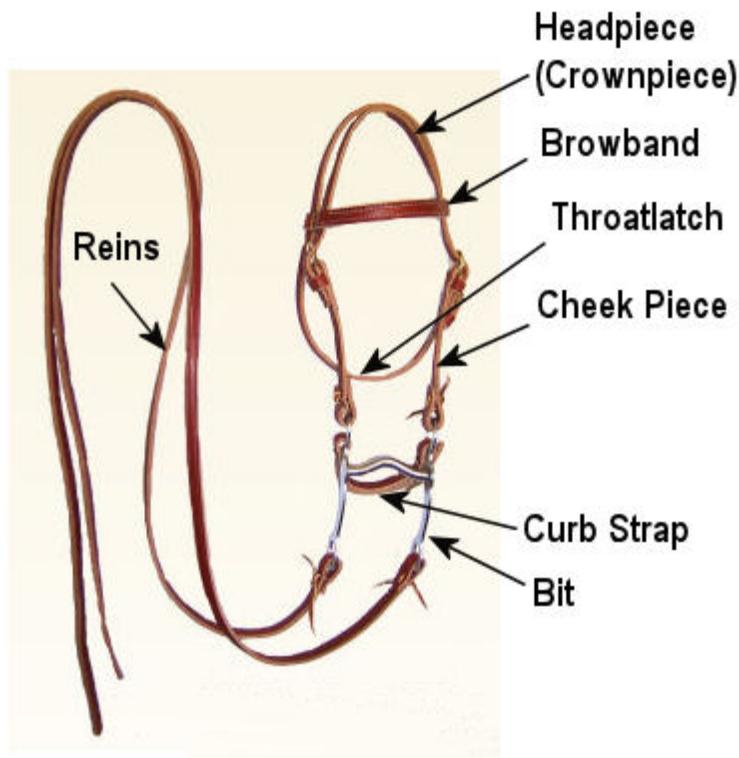
The **bridle** is used as a method of communication between the horse and the rider. Bridles are usually made of leather or a synthetic material such as nylon, and can usually be placed into one of two categories: English or Western

English bridles come in a variety of types, depending on the use of the horse and the bit that is needed. The basic English bridle consists of the headstall (crown/head piece, cheek pieces, and throat latch), brow band, cavesson or noseband, bit, and reins. English bridles may have one bit and one set of reins, one bit and two sets of reins, or two bits and two sets of reins. Regardless, the reins always buckle together at the end, but come in a variety of types such as plain, laced, rubber, or web.



Western bridles also come in a variety of types. A basic Western bridle consists of a headstall, bit and reins. The headstall may be one of three types: Split ear, slip ear, or conventional (the picture below shows the conventional type, which closely resembles an English bridle). Western bridles usually do not have cavessons or nosebands, and use only one bit and one set of reins. Western reins may either be open (also called split), closed (also called California), or roping style reins.

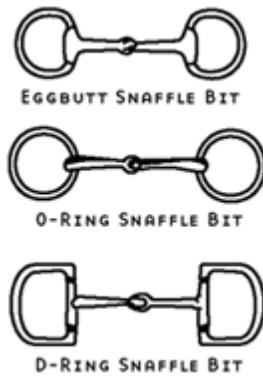
PARTS OF THE WESTERN BRIDLE



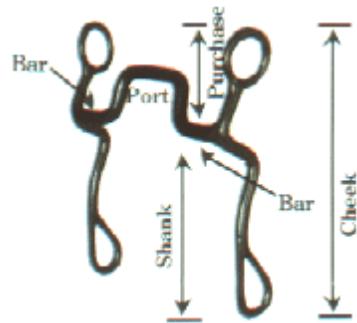
Bits commonly come in two types: snaffle and curb. Hackamores, which do not go in the horse's mouth, are also considered to be a type of bit. Both English and Western riders use snaffle bits. English riders also use curb bits, kimberwickes, pelhams, and occasionally hackamores. Western riders also use various types of curb bits and hackamores.

Bits work by exerting pressure on one or more parts of the horse's mouth or head. Bits may put pressure on the corners of the mouth, bars, tongue, roof of the mouth, curb groove, nose, and poll. With training, a horse is taught to respond in a certain way to pressure in these areas. In order for a horse to be trained and then respond properly, the rider must use a light hand.

Snaffle bits are very popular, and vary widely in design. No matter the type, all snaffle bits have either a jointed or straight mouthpiece with a ring on each end, which the reins are attached to. Snaffles are usually mild bits, but can be more severe depending on the thickness of the mouthpiece (thinner is more severe) and the type of mouthpiece (ranging from smooth to twisted or double twisted). When the rider pulls on the reins, a direct pressure is put on the horse's mouth, but not on the curb groove, nose, or poll. This action makes the snaffle a "non-leverage" bit. The picture shows three common types of snaffle bits.



Curb bits also vary in design. All curb bits, however, have a shank added to the end of the mouthpiece, which creates leverage, and a curb chain or strap that puts pressure on the curb groove of the horse's chin. Most curb bits have a straight mouthpiece. They can be quite severe depending on the thickness of the mouthpiece, length of the shank (longer is more severe), and the type of mouthpiece. The picture below shows a curb bit without a curb chain or strap, which attaches to the top rings.



Kimberwicke bits resemble snaffles, but are actually leverage bits. A kimberwicke bit has slots in the rings, where the reins can be attached, and a curb chain that exerts leverage in the same manner as a curb bit. Kimberwickes may have either jointed or straight mouthpieces.



A **Pelham** bit acts like a snaffle and a curb at the same time. Two sets of reins are used. The upper or top set of reins attaches to the snaffle rings of the bridle, while the bottom or lower set attaches to the shanks. Riders hold all four reins at the same time, and may choose to apply more pressure with one set, depending on the desired effect. Pelhams may have either straight or jointed mouthpieces, and the shanks vary in length.



A **Weymouth** bit is a curb with a fixed mouth. It is usually used in combination with a small loose ring snaffle, called a bridoon or bradoon, with the bridoon slightly higher in the horse's mouth; the whole set is called a full bridle, and it is used primarily on horses ridden saddle seat or in the higher levels of dressage.

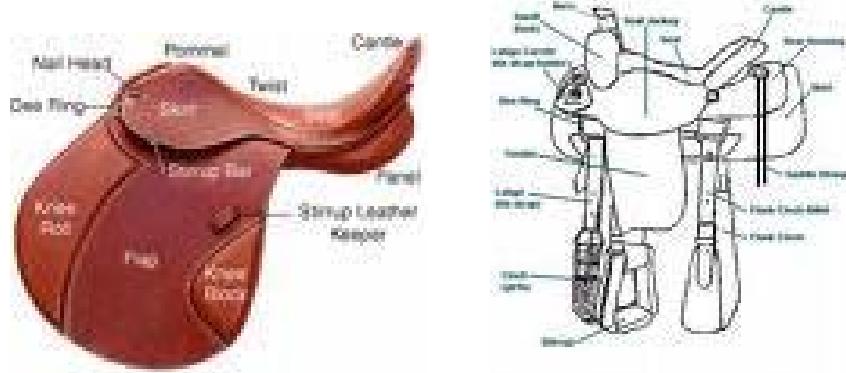


A **hackamore** is a bitless bridle that works by exerting pressure on areas other than the horse's mouth. A hackamore may use either a bosal, commonly used with young horses, or a mechanical hackamore bit. A bosal is a loop made out of rawhide that fits over the horse's nose; it acts mainly on the thin skin under the horse's jaw but also over the bridge of the nose and the poll. A mechanical hackamore has shanks and a curb chain or strap, much like a curb bit, but they are connected to the noseband instead of a mouthpiece. A mechanical hackamore also acts under the horse's jaw, with more leverage than a bosal. In the picture below, the bosal is on the left, with the mechanical hackamore on the right.



Images via "hackamore" google images first page of results.

Saddles also come in two primary styles, English and Western, although there are several different sub-types among the categories. Saddles are usually made out of leather, although synthetic materials are becoming more common. The basic structural unit of the saddle, regardless of style, is the tree. Saddle trees may be made of fiberglass or wood; some English saddles feature trees that are adjustable in width, which can enable a saddle to fit a wide variety of horses. It is important to make sure that the saddle fits both the horse and the rider properly. English saddles are commonly divided into two categories: Saddle Seat and Hunt Seat, with hunt seat saddles further grouped into All-Purpose, Close Contact, and Dressage.



Saddle Seat saddles are relatively flat, with a cutback head to accommodate the horse's withers. These kinds of saddles are commonly used on gaited horses and other "saddle type" breeds such as Morgans, Tennessee Walkers, Saddlebreds, Paso Finos and Arabians. Saddle seat saddles place the rider well behind the horse's withers, which accommodates the high-stepping of gaited horses.



All Purpose saddles can be used for a variety of events within the hunt seat discipline, from eventing to trail riding. It has a padded knee roll, which many riders find helps them feel comfortable and secure, in addition to a slightly deeper seat than the Close Contact. The flap is still more forward, however, than that of a saddle seat.



Close Contact saddles are designed primarily for jumping. To help the rider be in close contact with the horse, as the name suggests, this type of saddle does not have a padded knee flap, and the seat is flatter than that of an All-Purpose saddle. In this saddle, the rider can be the most effective during jumping.



Dressage saddles are designed specifically to be used in dressage. The purpose of the saddle is to give the rider maximum leg contact with the horse, so the flaps are longer and encourage the rider to ride with long stirrups. The seat is also much deeper than the other types of English saddles. Dressage saddles are made both with and without padded knee flaps.



Although **Western** saddles also come in a large variety of styles made specifically for certain events and purposes, a basic Western saddle can serve for a wide range of activities. Common types of Western saddles include:

- Pleasure/Trail: The most basic type of Western saddle.
- Endurance: Lighter than a basic saddle, designed for long rides.
- Western Pleasure/Equitation: Often heavy and fancy saddles decorated with complicated silver work to catch a judge's eye in the show ring.
- Reining: With a very deep seat but low and slanted cantle to keep the rider exactly over the horse's center of balance.
- Barrel Racing/Gymkhana events: Lightweight, with a deep seat and a tall horn to help the rider on turns. Sometimes has a back cinch to help keep it in place.
- Roping: A heavy and sturdy saddle with an upright horn. Always has a back cinch for stability.
- Cutting: Flat seat and a low, wide cantle to keep the rider over the horse's center of balance. Also has a tall horn, as most riders hold on while the horse works.

Saddle pads and blankets have at least four purposes: to protect the horse's back, to absorb sweat and moisture, to protect the saddle, and to help the saddle fit better. In general, Western pads or blankets extend further beyond the edges of the saddle than English pads or blankets; however, both must be larger than the saddle they are used with.

Western saddle pads or blankets are often rectangular in shape and can be made from a variety of materials, including wool Navajo blankets, blended fiber blankets which look like Navajo blankets, or felt blankets. They must be cleaned regularly.

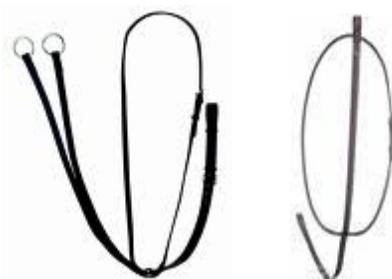


English saddle pads, especially for all purpose or close contact saddles, may be in the shape of the saddle itself, with a few extra inches beyond the saddle all around. English pads, especially dressage, may also be rectangular in shape. Saddle seat saddles are often used without a saddle pad, or with a smaller rectangular pad. English pads may be made out of fleece, quilted, or a variety of other materials, many of which are machine-washable. They, too, must be cleaned regularly.



Other types of tack that are commonly used include various training devices and additions to the saddle or bridle.

Martingales are training devices typically used with English saddles; they help keep the horse's head in the position desired by the rider. The two most common types are the "running" martingale and the "standing" martingale. The Western version of a standing martingale is called a "tie-down." The running martingale, pictured below on the left, has a strap that runs from the girth between the horse's legs and then splits into two separate pieces. At the end of each piece is a ring that the rein runs through. The straps are kept in place through an additional strap that makes a loop around the base of the horse's neck. A standing martingale, or Western tie-down, looks similar to a running martingale however, instead of two straps, the standing martingale has only one strap, and it connects to the bottom of the noseband. Martingales should only be used by or under the supervision of advanced riders, as they can become a substitute for proper training and riding. The standing martingales are not recommended for trail riding and are banned in eventing because they inhibit free movement of the horses head in the case of a fall.



Breastplates or Breastcollars resemble martingales, but their main purpose is to keep the saddle from slipping too far back on the horse's back or sideways. Instead of attaching to the bridle, the breastplate attaches to the saddle and then encircles the horse's neck. English styles are usually plain and match the bridle, while Western styles vary from plain and functional to ornately decorated and used only for shows.



Types of Equipment

The most common types of equipment are general horse equipment and accessories, grooming supplies, and barn equipment.

General horse equipment and accessories are items that are used in the everyday care and handling of a horse.

All horses should have a **halter** that fits properly: not too tight and not too loose. Halters are available in a large variety of materials, with the most common being leather and nylon, which comes in different colors and patterns.



In addition to a well-fitting halter, a **lead rope** or **lead line** is essential for leading the horse. Lead ropes also come in many colors and materials, including cotton, nylon, and leather. Lead shanks, which have a chain on the end, are also available, but are not necessary for most horses and should be used with the supervision of a professional.



Grooming equipment: Is used to keep the horse clean. A basic grooming kit includes a curry comb, hard brush, soft brush, hoof pick, and mane and tail comb. There are many other items available, but these are the essentials.

The **curry comb** is used to loosen dirt and debris from the horse's coat. The curry should be used only on well-muscled areas of the horse; the head and legs should be avoided.



A **hard brush** is used to remove what is loosened by the curry comb. It should be used in stiff strokes. The legs and head of the horse should be avoided unless the horse is extremely muddy.



The **soft brush** is used to give the horse's coat a polish and also to clean the sensitive areas of the horse's body, such as the legs and face.



A **hoof pick** is used to clean dirt, stones, and manure from the horse's feet. Hoof picks are available with or without attached brushes, which can be helpful for cleaning.



A **mane and tail comb** is used to keep the mane and tail free of tangles. Horse specific versions are available, but it is also acceptable to use brushes designed for human hair.



A **tote or box** is essential to keep all of the grooming supplies together. A variety of styles are available, ranging from wood and plastic totes to different types of bags.



Barn equipment: There are many items necessary to good stable management, and they cannot all be outlined here. However, the most basic items are flat-backed buckets for water and feed, muck buckets for cleaning, manure forks, shovel, broom, and a basic horse first aid kit.

Flat-backed buckets can be hung in the horse's stall to provide feed and water.



Muck buckets may be used for cleaning stalls, often with a cart for easy movement. Alternatively, a wheelbarrow may be used.



Manure forks are the most basic stall cleaning tool. The most common versions are made of plastic, although other types are available.



A **broom** is used to sweep the stable after cleaning.



A **shovel** can be used to pick up piles of manure, and also after sweeping.



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