

Body Basics

with Jay Duke

Set yourself up for success with these **three key exercises** for better body control over fences

by Lindsay Brock/Jump Media

As he begins a lesson, Jay Duke can often be heard telling his riders that “good position creates good jumps.” During decades of teaching throughout North America, the Canadian Show Jumping Team veteran has maintained the axiom that position is paramount and that it hinges on solid and effective body control. For some riders, that means they need to hit the gym to strengthen their core; others may need to push themselves over more jumps to gain more mileage.

For Duke, either process comes down to one ideal result – to keep the rider in sync with their horse.

“All the points of good position are accomplished in order to keep the rider with the horse, able to get out of the horse’s way at the base of the fence, and immediately continue riding upon landing,” said Duke. He has developed a checklist that he shares with every rider who participates in one of his popular clinics from western Canada to the northeastern United States.

Checking the boxes of the Body Control Checklist on the flat prior to jumping is imperative.



Jay Duke's Body-Control Checklist:

- Consistent weight distributed across the stirrup bar on the ball of the foot
- A straight line from heel to hip to shoulder in three-point position
- A centered and relaxed seat that is neither ahead nor behind the motion
- A soft hand that stays in the 'glass box' above the withers
- A flat back
- A forward sightline (eyes up!)



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(Above) This rider has a very nice leg position but was a little rusty over fences, so my critique was to focus on a straight back and soft hands.

(Left) Jay Duke, Canadian Equestrian Team veteran and show jumping clinician.

3 Body Control Exercises

1. Before and After

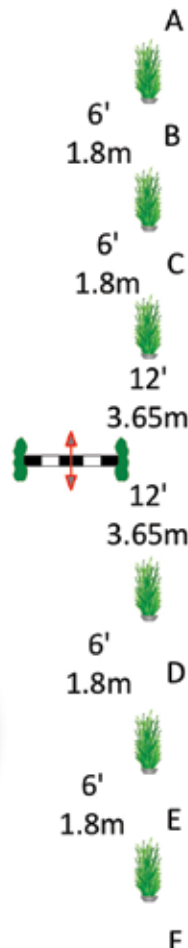
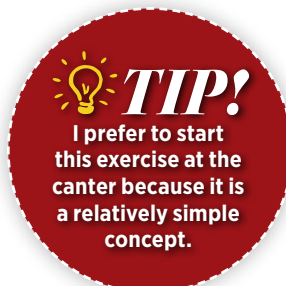
This exercise tests riders in two ways. First, it requires them to control the track to and away from the fence by riding inside leg to outside rein through the approach and exit turns. Second, they must maintain an even rhythm. What makes it an excellent body-control exercise is that these two goals are pretty straightforward unless a rider is out of position. Perfect position allows for perfect control, a necessity for success in "Before and After."

"What I see a lot in the show ring is a rider that is either not strong enough to stay secure in their position over the fence, or a rider who is not mentally experienced enough to ride effectively immediately after a jump," said Duke. "At the end of this exercise, a rider should be able to maintain the same stable position from approach to landing and through the turn. Of course, the higher the fence, the bigger the body-control test."

The full exercise will be:

- A to F (long to long)
- A to E (long to medium)
- A to D (long to short)
- B to F (medium to long)
- B to E (medium to medium)
- B to D (medium to short)
- C to F (short to long)
- C to E (short to medium)
- C to D (short to short)

Change direction and start at the beginning



BEFORE AND AFTER

It is equally important to be efficient and quick after a jump, especially when practicing for a jump-off. But without a secure position before, during, and after the fence, neither of these things will be easily attainable. This exercise includes three approaches and three landings, which can be done at the walk with a pole or at the trot and canter with a vertical.

Set up markers A to F (eg. cones, shrubs or standards) at the distances from the jump as shown.

Begin on the left lead, then canter through Marker A and jump the fence. Continue to Marker F in order to start on a long approach to a long landing. Next, go from Marker A to Marker E, then Marker A to Marker D. This is a continuous exercise, so keep going until you have gone from a long approach through all the landing options to a short one. Then, begin to shorten the approach until you are jumping a short approach to a short landing.



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(Above) A rider falling forward over the fence creates an unorganized position upon landing which makes it impossible to correctly ride the first stride away from the fence.

(Right) While her body is in great position over the fence, this rider's eyes are of particular note. Up and forward!

2. Simple Gymnastics

Obviously, flatwork is key to perfecting a strong and stable position. A gymnastic is a great tool that begins incorporating jumps and tests the effectiveness of the flatwork.

"I always like to start riders off trotting into a gymnastic," said Duke. "When we are working strictly on position, a trot approach takes away any anxiety about finding a distance. All I want them thinking about is their body – a deep heel, quiet seat, and soft hand. A lot of riders like to sit down in the middle of the gymnastic, but I like to encourage them to stay in the two-point position the entire way through the exercise. This prevents a deep seat that is unintentionally engaging the horse to get too fast and long in the exercise."

GYMNASTIC #1

Trot in, canter one stride to fence #2, and canter one stride to fence #3.

GYMNASTIC #2

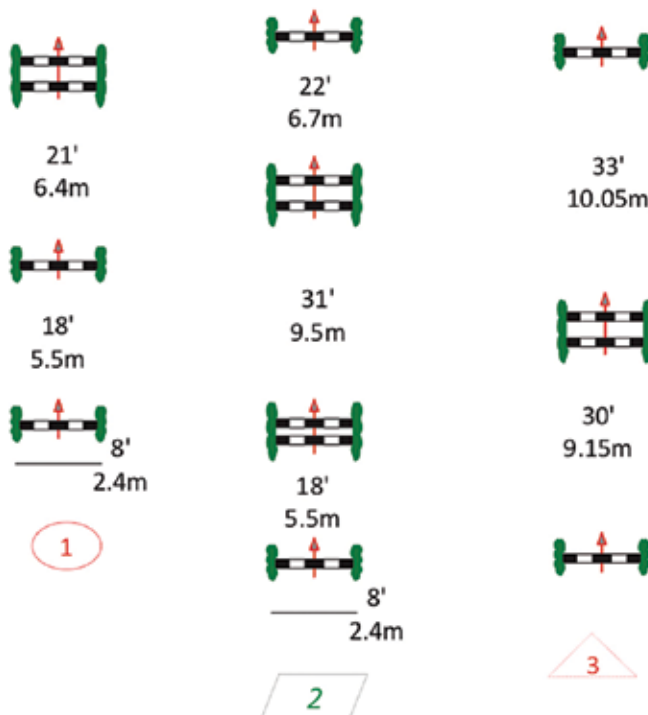
Trot in, canter one stride to fence #2, canter two strides to fence #3, and canter one stride to fence #4.

GYMNASTIC #3

Canter in, canter two strides to fence #2, and canter two strides to fence #3.

SIMPLE GYMNASTICS

This exercise creates a welcoming environment for riders because they can shift all of their attention to working on their position while the exercise itself dictates the distance. This particular gymnastic includes three grids that increase in difficulty. When jumping these, always remember to ride in on a nice forward pace and maintain it throughout.



TIP!
The distances may seem a little short, but I set my distances quiet to help create the correct arc of the horse's bascule over the jump. Adjust accordingly for your horse's stride.

3. L Line

Once a rider is stable in their position over fences and through corners, it's time to start putting the pieces together. Jump, turn, and do it fast sounds simple, but without a balanced rider, it's anything but. This exercise will reveal a rider's weaknesses in body control in the turn and through the line. But once they conquer navigating this exercise smoothly, this lesson will bring a rider one step closer to an effective and correct ride over a course.

Skinny (no wings)



60'
18.3m

L LINE

Start with a skinny (no wings) fence on the short end of the ring. Jump in on a steady stride and turn in four or five strides to a three-fence combination. The combination is an oxer, one stride to another oxer, and two strides to a vertical. Next, reverse the exercise. Riding the exercise in the other direction requires a more open stride into the combination. The rider **MUST** land in a secure position off the oxers in order to make an accurate turn to the skinny.



24'
7.3m



36'
11m



TIP!

Always practice maintaining and/or regaining position after a forward effort.

Putting It All Together – Course Work

All three of these exercises set a rider's position up for success when testing the checklist over a full course. Duke's final tip for riders putting their body control to the test is to up the ante with course work at home that is always more difficult than in competitions so that there are no surprises in the show ring.

"If done correctly, these three exercises will make the final course work easy," said Duke. "Breaking down the elements of body control and then putting the pieces together often surprises the rider with results they did not think they could achieve! For me, as a trainer, that's the ultimate success." 🐾

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The final product! A rider that has maintained position throughout the fence and is landing ready to ride the first stride effectively.



BELIEVE IN MIRACLES

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If you are interested in adopting this gentle guy, please contact LongRun.

416-675-3993 ext 1-3440 or info@longrunretirement.com

