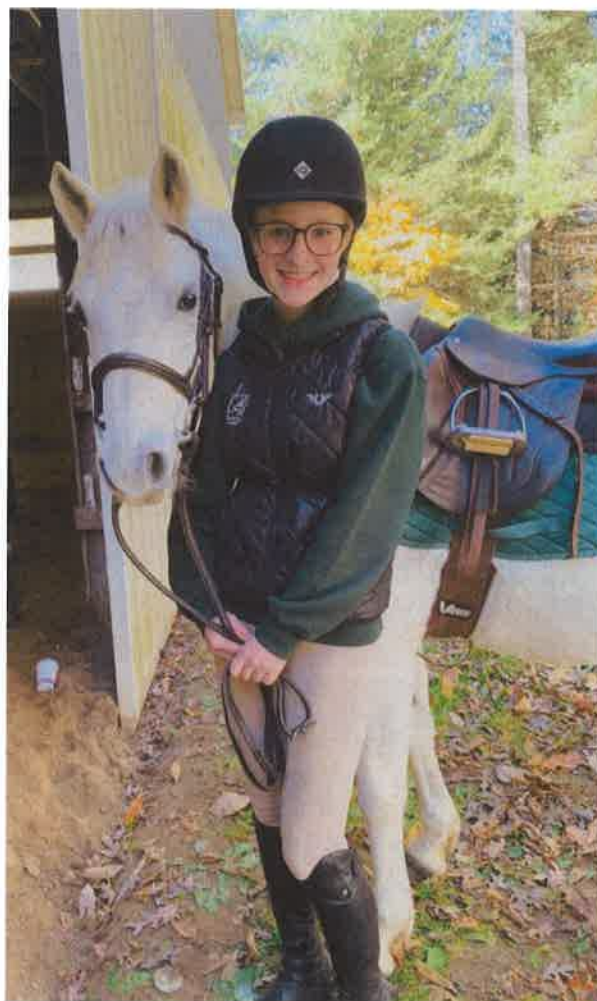


Example of eight journal questions targeting competency skill sets

1. Can you tell me what you have been working on with your horse (s)?
2. I know you generally train and perform alone although has there been a time in which you worked with a group? If so, can you tell me how you all worked together as a team?
3. Is there anything that you feel would help you to strengthen your riding/training abilities?
4. How do you go about improving performance, do you have a practice plan that you follow?
5. Thinking 'outside the box', if your horse could speak, what do you think he/she would tell you about themselves?
6. In regards to nutrition, are there foods that help the horse stay healthy for training that will support your riding?
7. When you are working on and off the horse, what type of motor skills do you feel that you are using? Do you feel that these skills are demonstrated on a daily/weekly basis?
8. What do you do if a horse does not want to cooperate with your commands?

#1

The past Saturday, (11/6/2021) we had a tiny little barn show where people competed in divisions for some extra practice. I took my trainer's advanced jumper pony (fast, uncontrollable) in the jumper division. We won the 18" jumpers with a clean and timely round, the only problem is I was galloping around the ring because I was unable to stop which was honestly kind of funny. He is a crazy pony rescued from a kill pen that loves to jump and go fast. I had a blast bringing him out back into a show again. I also took Luna, a chestnut quarter horse jumper in the hunter derby and we had won that class as well, which was a lot of fun because we got to jump outside. It was a beautiful day to ride outside. It took a lot of upper body strength to stop Jimmy from running around, (hahaha) and lower leg strength to keep me from falling off.



#2

This is such a great question because there are actually a lot of different opportunities to play this sport as a team. For example, when I attended finals in Skowhegan Maine last fall, there was something called a team challenge. Team challenge is an event, where riders and horse pairs are picked from a hat and put on a team. They all have to ride the same course, while wearing fun costumes and props, like butterfly wings, different decorations on the horse and rider to match the theme. The goal is to get the best percentage to add to your team's total. Something like an 80 would be a moderate/pretty good round. Each rider starts off with a 100 and points are deducted for other errors and incidents if present. The team with the highest combined scores are at the top. Team challenge also has the rule of no trainers or professionals allowed to coach. So all the team members work together to learn the course, help others, and cheer them on. Last year, since I was competing in so many classes, there wasn't enough time for me to fit in the team challenge, but it was blast to watch. Here are some examples of a recent team challenge that just happened in Ocala Florida at the World Equestrian Center, Which I will be competing at in July of next year!!

As far as just working together on a regular day to day basis, my sister and I are always with each other at the show ring. We help each other learn the courses, prepare, tack up eachothers horses, and video record them. I am always helping her, and she is always helping me, whether that means helping me walk the course at a competition, or helping train horses by tacking up the next one for me to ride, while I am working another. We always switch off the role of "personal assistant" so that when it is our time to compete or train or really get into the mode of riding, we can have our fullest moment possible.



I love this question because I can always improve on any section of my riding. I have a very strong lower leg, and a seat. I've sat many bad behaviors on a horse that have caused me to almost fall off, but they have made me grow stronger. But no matter what, when I get on a different horse, my lower leg and seat could be absolutely horrible on a different horse. But the one thing I could always improve and brush up on all the time is equine nutrition. The health of the horse impacts the way that you ride and how comfortable they are. I think it is incredibly interesting, varying nutrition and supplements can change so many things. Including energy, relaxedness, and performance. Chanel is on a low carb grain because she gains weight pretty quickly, she is also on raspberry leaves for leveling hormones, because she is very hormonal and will let you know, and she is on cosequin because it is filled with glucosamine to better her joints. She, along with her normal low carb grain, has a hay stretcher in her food which allows her stomach to usefully take the nutrients out of the hay that she eats. These are all in pellet or powder form which she has no problem eating, but adding or taking away one of these things that are in her diet can change her performance so much. From time to time, we will throw in an herbal supplement to calm her in the winter season and add a stomach ulcer preventative. It all depends on how she is feeling and no matter what horse I am dealing with, there is always more knowledge to know and more stuff to try.

Talking more about nutrition which I could talk about for days, is when we are traveling to a competition we will give an oral supplement called PerfectPrep. It is completely natural and basically just filled with Magnesium and B12. We give this to prevent ulcers, trailering to competitions can be stressful. (especially when we were stuck on that drawbridge in Maine... omg what a horrible experience) this just prevents and makes the travel more comfortable. Another thing we do when we are away shows where we stay for multiple days, is we soak their grain. Which includes all of her normal supplements. Soaking grain is better for easier digestion which is better when they are eating in a different environment. I can always learn more about this, and even though it does not directly affect my position riding, it improves my understanding of my partner and it's always something to evaluate if something seems off or if something is working well.

Improving performance can go a bunch of different ways. Spending on the skill, we either focus and centralize the lesson about the skill, or if we have to do a quick reset in our progress to fix a skill, that can happen too. I have overall pretty good form on a horse, but I develop these absolutely atrocious habits that ruin my riding. To list a few, my right hand is always farther forward than my left, my left shoulder always drops down, I pulse my heel up and down to try and compensate for my weak upper body, and my lower legs sometimes slip out from under me. There are all nit picky things that a lot of professionals in the horse industry wouldn't notice, but since I am competing at the level I am and in a very competitive division, these things significantly impact my placings in competitions. So for example, my habit of bringing my right hand farther in front than my left hand is a very odd habit as said by my trainer, but instead of stepping back a bit or resetting my riding, we took the twine off a hay bale and restricting the use of right hand tying the string to my belt. Sounds dangerous, I know, but actually very useful and safe under supervision and temperament of my amazing lease horse Mario.

A lot of my issues are with my confidence, I often get nervous and anxious about what I am doing, and stress myself out, to that point it's either usck it up or take a step back, which both are fine in certain situations. In conclusion, it really depends on the situation and if it is more of a confidence issue, technical problem, or bad habit

I think this is an interesting question because each horse would be so different, when thinking about Jimmy, Luna, or Chanel, the three ponies I mainly work with. With Jimmy it would be a lot of "I don't like" or "please don't", with all of his past traumatizing experiences, he is skittish, likes very few people, and finds a lot of situations involving humans uncomfortable and provoking some thoughts. I would honestly do so much to get in their brains, because a lot of what I tell people, is what I am interpreting from their body language, which could be completely different from what they are feeling. With Luna, I think it would be mostly, "I don't like messing around doing the little things, I love the big jumps." Luna is so much more than one of our safest ponies for the little kids and now she is getting out to do some more stuff with 3ft jumps and have seen her mood improve immensely. As much as she looks miserable going around the ring with her head up in the air like a donkey, she knows what she's doing, and would do anything to keep the kid on her back safe. She often thinks that we are asking too much of her sometimes, and she feels out of her realm, in which we step back and look at her happiness and ability and weigh the two. I think she would also say "I will always tell you, when I've had enough, and when I am done." Because she does! She gets moody, angry, sour, just overall not happy.

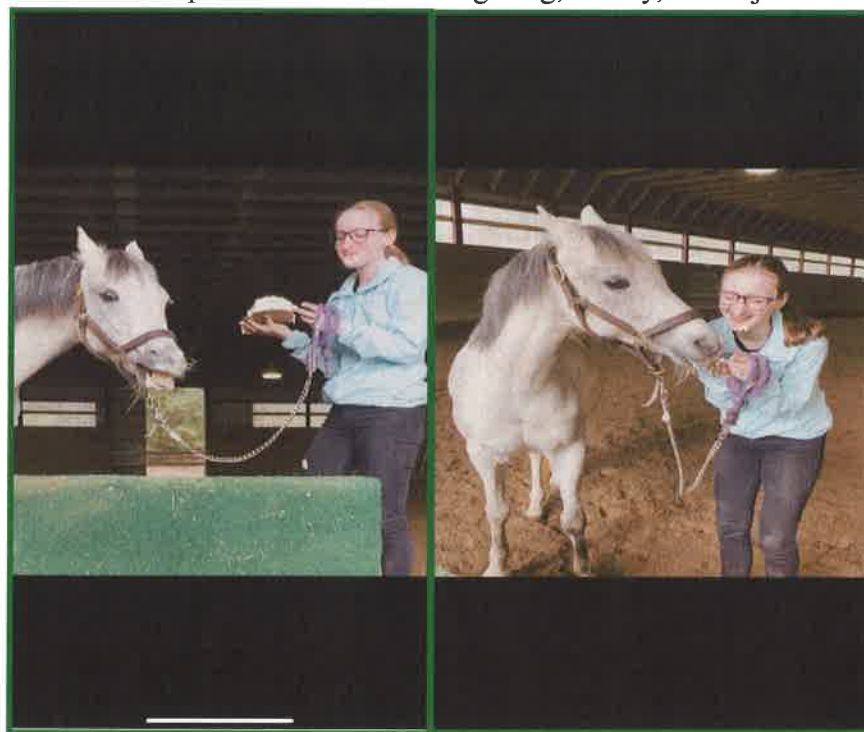
Chanel is on the opposite side of the spectrum, she is the most outgoing, loving, sweetest pony I've ever met. It's hard to make her not like you, she loves the attention, and is just like a best friend. With being one of the most kid and loving ponies, she is also really really fancy, being a purebred welsh pony, which is the ideal model for a high class pony. We (as in me and my trainer) wanted to step her up a division, but she isn't that athletic and would be much happier staying in the division she did last year. With me growing up, we had to split as a team/show pair because I needed to go to a higher level. Whenever I would go to the barn to ride a different horse, because she was truly happier doing something else, she would always winny for me. I cried about it a lot (ahhaha) it hurt because she has a stronger connection with me than anyone else. Part of me knows she's happier taking the little kids around, but part of me thinks she wants to have the partnership we had. I think he would say "I am sorry." Because she so badly wanted to do this show season with, me, but it just didn't work out, and she knows how much I miss going into the ring with her, I still get to ride her whenever I want, get her ready at the shows for the littler kids, but I know she's upset that we aren't back in the ring, winning gigantic 17 horse classes, and being the only pony.

On the left is Jimmy right after our ride, posing for the camera, and on the right is Jimmy free lunging and running around the ring like a complete psycho, but quite entertaining!



#6

I love these questions because they just are so fun to answer. Horses and ponies like coco chanel (pictured below) fluctuate very differently depending on the season which means that we as in my trainer and I have to alter her diet throughout the winter and summer months. Coco has a hard time staying sound, which means not having a problem with her muscles, bodies, or bones, so we cannot ride her as often. The winter months are really hard for animals to go through because they are often housed to extreme weather and snow, which means they don't move around a lot and get their bodies in motion. So, she spends a lot of time eating, which means we cut down on the grain to make sure she does not get too heavy. Another thing is ENERGY. Energy is a HUGE part of diet, with an absolutely crazy psycho, unmanageable, unstable Jimmy, he is on a low sugar, low carb, so that does not enhance his hyper-ness. Ponies do get sugar highs too, so when Coco and I celebrate with cupcakes or cake for a birthday, she loves to run around in the pasture after. (picture from my birthday below) Another thing where we have to change our diet to enhance performance is when we go to shows. (which I am actually going this weekend with Coco up to Vermont to show!) There is no cinnamon 3 days before a horse show. Some of the high level shows we go to, do a simple blood test to make sure there are no illegal drugs enhancing the performance, and treats with cinnamon or pure cinnamon can come up as some sort of performance enhancing drug, falsely, so we just avoid it all together.



Whether I am on or off the horse working around the barn I am constantly lifting and using different muscle groups in my body to complete tasks. Caring for the horses, such as lifting a bucket of water, hauling hay, or carrying grain bags, specifically targets my core and upper body to engage. Grooming the horses or picking their feet requires multitasking to make sure that the horses needs are met and I am doing my job to the best of my ability. When I am working a horse or riding my new lease horse "Super Mario" but we call him Mario around the barn, I am looking to connect my body with the horses and understand the meets of how it is trained. Every single horse is different, and recently with him I have just been figuring out his quirks and some errors that I make while riding him. This teaches my body and mind to connect within each other and adapt to the horses' well being and happiness. When I am riding a horse or currently re-training one like a quarter pony mare named Luna I have been recently riding, I am looking for understanding of the concepts I am trying to apply, and to break bad habits. She has this really horrible habit of over tucking her head, (putting her chin to her chest) in a harsh manner because that was the way that she was taught. We (as in my trainer and I) are looking for Luna to carry herself and usher whole body to move forward. I am looking for signs of relaxation like loosened neck muscles when riding, collection of her spine and hind quarters. All of this not only works my muscles to understand the amount of pressure needing to be applied, and my mind to put the pieces together of her behavior and general emotion.

Everytime I hop on a horse I am always looking to better my understanding of the animal and that uses the mobility of my body and mental interpretation. Some habits that I may do as a rider like for example, holding with my knee onto the saddle a bit more, may upset Luna and cause her to be more tense and reactive, so I have to use other core muscle groups like my triceps and quads to hold on there as another balance of support for myself. Mario which I have just gotten into figuring out and working as a team with (which I can't wait for next year with him!!) specifically if I "pulse" or add my heel upwards as a motivational message for him to go, will result in me falling off from a 5'9 in human measurement horse, in substitution for that, I have to lengthen my muscles, and apply my calf of my leg instead of heel to better suit his understanding of what I mean. In conclusion, riding these horses trains my body and mind to be align and in sync and I am always trying to better myself for the horses through physical education and mental understanding.

8

When a horse is not cooperating, a lot of the time it's the rider. Horses cannot speak and communicate like a human, so body language is the tell tale sign of when a horse is not cooperating. And when the horse is not cooperating, it's because it is not fully understanding what is being asked from the rider. There are a lot of ways that communication can go wrong. There are generally three different ways to approach problems like this, and they all deal with accessing the condition or status of the horse, rider, or exercise/task asking to be performed. These can all cause miscommunication between a horse and rider, and changing and reevaluating what may be the cause of the issue. It is imperative to have a trainer there most of the time, so that you can get a set of professional eyes on what is happening, and they can better direct the rider and horse to the correct path.