

How to Adjust a Snaffle Bridle

If your bridle is correctly sized for your horse, adjusted properly and kept clean and conditioned, it will function properly as an aid to your riding. It will also be comfortable for your horse to wear next to the sensitive areas of his head.

Here are some steps for adjusting a snaffle bridle on your horse. If you would like help determining the size bridle or bit your horse requires, see “How to Measure for a Bridle” and “How to Measure for a Bit.”

1 Adjust the cheek pieces and bit height.

With the bridle on your horse’s head and the reins looped over his neck as shown in the photo, adjust the cheek pieces to achieve the proper bit height. In general, with the cheek pieces appropriately buckled and the bit correctly sized, you should see one to two soft wrinkles appearing at the corners of your horse’s lips as a starting point for adjusting the bit height. (For a Pelham or Kimberwick bit, you’ll only want to see one soft wrinkle at the corner of the lips.) See Sidebar.

2 Check the browband.

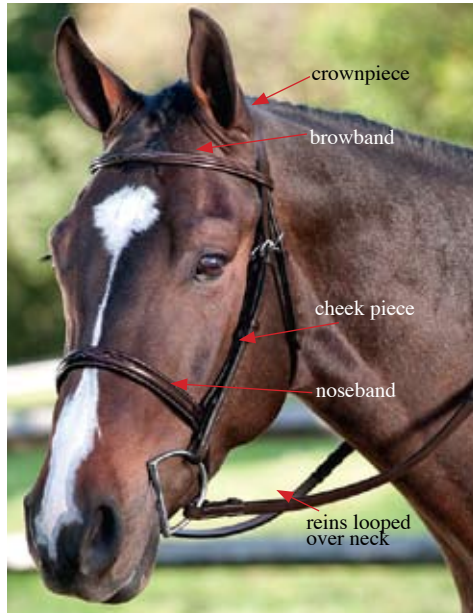
The browband should rest lightly across your horse’s forehead, just about ½ to 1 inch below the front of his ears. Be sure the browband is long enough so that it doesn’t pull the crownpiece into the back of your horse’s ears. Conversely, if it sticks out, forms a gap in front of the horse’s forehead or wiggles when the horse moves, then the browband is too long.

Tip: Many styles of browbands are available separately. You can swap out your browband any time you’d like a new look for your bridle, or if your horse’s bridle fits but you’d like another size browband.

3 Adjust the noseband.

The placement and fit of the noseband varies very slightly depending on the type used. A standard noseband or cavesson should sit level at a point about ½ to 1 inch below the horse’s cheekbone. As a general guideline, you can use one finger’s width to measure the space from the bottom of the cheekbone to the top of the noseband.

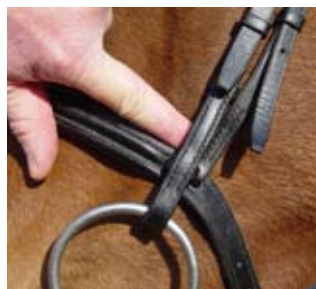
Some nosebands come with integrated hangers that adjust on both sides of the horse’s face. Buckle the hangers by the horse’s



Parts of a Bridle

cheeks on this type of noseband in the same hole on each side. An example of this type of noseband can be seen in the Showmark Deluxe Hunter Bridle from Dover Saddlery.

If positioned correctly, the noseband will not interfere with the movement of the bit rings, pinch the lips or press on the soft tissue of the horse’s nose in such a way as to hamper the horse’s breathing. You should be able to place a finger inside the noseband underneath the jaw, and yet it should be fastened snugly enough to prevent flapping during riding.



One finger’s width between the end of the horse’s cheekbone and the noseband.

More on Cheek Pieces and Bit Height:

All horses are different; some horses prefer a higher or lower setting for their bits. When following the cheek piece adjustment guidelines in this article, be sure to take into account your horse’s preferences. Observe your horse’s behavior and his response to the bit, and make adjustments accordingly.

Ideally, if your crown piece and cheek pieces together are appropriately sized, the buckles of each cheek piece will be located about 1 to 1 ½ inches above your horse’s eye level, and you’ll be able to use the same holes on both sides of your horse’s face so that the buckles are positioned evenly. You’ll also ideally have at least one hole left above the buckles in case the leather stretches over time and you need to shorten the cheek pieces or raise the bit later.

If the crown piece and/or cheek pieces are too long for your horse, you may not be able to adjust the height of the bit in the horse’s mouth correctly. It could hang too low in your horse’s mouth, clank against his teeth, and become an ineffective riding aid. Some horses may require a horse size bridle with cob size cheek pieces to get a good fit. If the crownpiece and cheek pieces are too short, the bit could pull too high in the horse’s mouth, which may cause discomfort or behavioral issues.

Tip: If you change the bit later on, differently sized bit rings may require an adjustment of the cheek pieces.

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[How to Fit a Halter](#)

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Fitting Tip

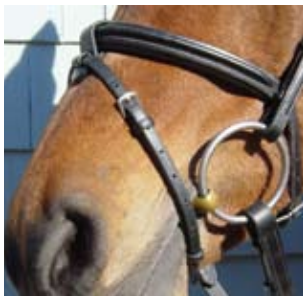
Leather bridle parts may stretch very slightly over time with use and conditioning. Check the fit of your bridle periodically and make any necessary adjustments.

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One finger inserted into noseband to check that it isn't buckled too tightly.

Flash Noseband – The cavesson part of the noseband should sit just under the cheekbones without pressing on them. The flash attachment will then rest on the nasal bone and will not press on the soft tissue of the horse's nose. The flash should stretch comfortably down over the horse's jaws in front of the bit. Many people position the flash so that the buckle rests near the loop attachment for the flash rather than on the soft tissue near the lips. The keeper for the flash can be positioned so that it does not cause discomfort on the soft tissue as well.



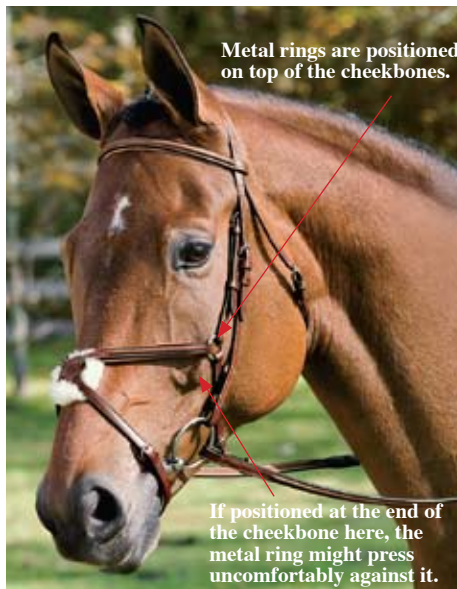
Flash attachment sits on nasal bone.

Flash not too tight, and placed in front of bit but not where it can compress the nostrils.

Flash keepers positioned so as not to pinch horse's lips.

Jawband or Crank Noseband – The cavesson part of the noseband should sit just under the cheekbones without pressing on them. The buckle of this type of noseband is padded and designed to be tightened as needed by the requirements of the horse. The buckling system allows tightening with even pressure on both sides of the noseband. If the jawband has a flash attached, then it should be fastened as described for a flash noseband.

Figure 8 Noseband – The straps of this type of noseband need to be adjusted properly to be effective and to avoid hampering the horse's breathing. The padded disk should rest on the nasal bone so that the straps cross over this bone. The lower strap



Metal rings are positioned on top of the cheekbones.

If positioned at the end of the cheekbone here, the metal ring might press uncomfortably against it.

stretches down over the horse's jaw in front of the bit.

The upper strap may be positioned just under the cheekbones or on top of the cheekbones, depending on both the type of Figure 8 used and rider preference. Generally, if the straps of the Figure 8 attach to metal rings, many riders position the rings on top of the cheekbones so that this hardware does not press against the end of the horse's cheekbone. See above photo.

If the Figure 8 does not use metal rings, but rather has adjustable leather slides, many riders position the upper strap just under the horse's cheekbone, as shown in the next photo.



A Figure 8 noseband that does not have metal rings can be adjusted below the cheekbones.

Drop Noseband – The nosepiece of this type of noseband should sit on the bony part of the nose, about four finger's width above the nostrils. The rings on which the chin strap portions of the noseband are attached should not come in contact with the bit. The chin strap should stretch down in front of the bit and be buckled under the jaw only snug enough that you can slip two fingers between it and the jaw bones. Take special care to be sure this type of noseband won't affect the horse's breathing after it is buckled into place.

Note: Nosebands function differently and produce varied results on horses. Always consult a trainer or a knowledgeable friend for help adjusting the noseband if you have questions about the way a particular style of noseband could influence your horse.

4 Adjust the throatlatch.

Buckle the throatlatch so that you can fit four fingers between it and the underside of jaw—but not more. The throatlatch is intended to keep the bridle in place if the need arises during a ride. If it is adjusted too loosely, the throatlatch cannot perform its function if needed. If it is buckled too tightly, it can hamper the horse's breathing. Some competitive riders prefer to have a slightly shorter throatlatch adjustment than the four-finger rule provides.



5 Adjust curb chain if necessary

If you're using a bit with a curb chain, such as a Kimberwick or Tom Thumb Pelham, adjust the curb chain.

Untwist any kinks in the chain so that it will lie flat against the horse's chin when the bit moves. As a general guideline, hook the chain at a length that allows you put two fingers between the chain and your horse's chin. This guideline will have to be adjusted according to your horse's needs. Some horses require a very loose curb chain setting, while others need a more snug adjustment.