

# A Bit

of clarification about Rings

By Manuel Trigo



What are the differences between the bit's rings. Why some rings have hooks. But more importantly, are you using the right ring for your snaffle?

**The Last article** about bits "The snaffle misunderstood" had some impact on many riders. Many people did also criticize it, positively or not. It has been shared and posted to the 4 corners of the internet.

What is very positive, after reading some of the reader's comments, is the fact that people care about their horses and if necessary, are ready to start learning more in order to improve their riding and communication with their horses. I also realized based on the comments on several social groups, that there is still something that is not clear at all for many readers and that it is how the rings of the snaffle work (loose ring, loose ring with sleeve, D ring, kimberwhick etc..) I see too often people who did understand how the mouthpiece(s) work(s), but still ride their horses in the wrong ring according what they try to accomplish with the horse. So allow me a few words to explain and clarify this matter.

**I will start by saying one more time that the mouthpiece is for the horse**

**and the rings or shank are for the rider.** This could sound very basic, but just respecting this postulate will avoid many problems. For the horse, we saw last time that we should use a bit as gentle as possible (This depending on the training of the horse and how much trustworthy he is). We also need to have the horse comfortable as much as possible in his mouth. However, always with the option to have control, in case of necessity (taking completely or partially the tongue), sooner or later depending on the design of the mouthpiece (ported, ported forward etc....). So, what about the ring or shank? I will limit this article to the rings, maybe at another time I will talk about the shanks.

**Why do we have different type of rings?** Some rounded and small, some rounded and big, some ovals, some like a D, some like a narrower D and so on. Because each design has a different purpose and goal regarding the **ACTION** of the mouthpiece and the **SPEED of the signal**. It is here that the large majority of the riders don't fully understand these two elements.

## THE LAST ARTICLE

If you need to read the first article, use this link.  
<http://trigomanuel.com/documents/Snaffle%20Article%20July.pdf>

## What is the ACTION of the ring on the mouthpiece?

encouraging and motivating the horse to flex at the poll. Some Rings will **NOT produce this effect**. So if your goal is to put the horse in the frame lowering his nose close to the vertical you should NOT use a ring that does not produce a downward effect. Does that sound logical? If you do so anyway... you are conditioning the horse to respond with a reflex which is not natural according what the mouthpiece is asking... this is not good communication. You will probably put the horse where you want but with hard labor, hard hands and arms, hard legs, performing the saw etc. Then one day, later in the training of the horse, you will pay the bill of this mistake, when for example using a double bridle. The horse will react the same way to both bits, performing a poll flexion. So one of the bits will be redundant, and the double bridle will not give the entire potential of this great tool. I did explain this in the previous article so I will not elaborate further.

### The second action is the direct action or Leverage action.

The ring can apply the **same pressure** to the mouthpiece that the hand of the rider is applying, when it is a **direct action**. However if the ring produces a **Leverage action**, this means that the **pressure on the mouthpiece is BIGGER** than the pressure applied by the rider's hands.

There are two actions that some rings can produce.

### The first action is the downward effect.

Tilting downward of the mouthpiece.

### What for?

To tell to the horse to lower his nose,

## What is the SPEED of the signal of the ring?

In addition to the action that a ring could have, **the design of the ring will affect the speed of the signal**. That means that when the rider uses his hands, producing a signal (pressure) to communicate with his horse (via the reins),

### the design of the ring will transmit the signal into the mouthpiece slowly, gradually or quickly with a small or bigger delay.

The signal will completely be transmitted at the moment when the rein will finally stop sliding on the ring.

### Why to have a slow signal?

Well the idea is to keep the horse as comfortable as possible and to communicate with him in a gentle way but firm. "Gentle" to give him time to do what the hand is asking. How much time? This will depend on the design and the size of the ring. The bigger the ring the slower the signal – The more rounded the "O" shape of the back part of the ring, the slower the signal.

I also said "Firm" because at one moment, if the horse didn't respond to the request of the rider's hand, the ring will allow to use of the full potential of mouthpiece.

### How does that work?

The signal will be delayed and/or slowly transmitted to the mouthpiece due to the movement of the rein sliding up the ring. When the rein finishes sliding up after a little while, the ring will tilt downward, which will tilt the mouthpiece downward.

### A Slow Signal increases the intensity of the mouthpiece gradually,

so the horse can feel that if he does obey immediately the mouthpiece will not get more severe. The mouthpiece will turn more severe in the horse's mouth when the rein reaches the locked place.

**When the design of ring produces a quick signal, the idea is to have a quicker response from the horse.**

Who would want a quicker response? Advanced riders, for example, will want a quick response from their horses, but also a rider using working horses whose job requires quick responses. For example, this is what makes the difference between an English (Dressage) D ring and a Western D ring. **Which is faster?** The western! The western D ring has a D shape that isn't as rounded backwards, so the rein travels quicker until its locked point. When the rein gets locked, the full potential of the mouthpiece is engaged.

**So if you are a beginner rider, with not as good of seat or hands,** you should pick up the mouthpiece your horse needs but with a **Ring that fits you**. In other words, a very big and rounded back D ring will certainly be a good choice. The slow signal will absorb many of your mistakes (of seat and hands) and will preserve the mouth of the horse.

I'm sure by now you are wondering which ring produces a downward effect, which has a direct action, which has a leverage action, which is slow and of course, which is fast. Right?

So let's go through the most popular rings:

### The Loose Ring:

Downward Effect: **NO**

Action: **Direct Action**

Signal: **Slow Signal**



### NO Downward Effect

As the name says very well, the ring is not attached directly to the mouthpiece. So this Ring does NOT give any DOWNWARD effect to the mouthpiece. Even after the rein slides all the way up on the ring, the ring will bring the mouthpiece backwards but will not tilt it downward. Not surprising that a common name in French for this ring is "Lifting snaffle".

Another benefit of this ring is that the play with lifting and releasing the

fresh and the brain relaxed. Of course

horse will mouthpiece in his mouth, keeping the mouth

this benefit will be lost if the horse is equipped with a flash or nose band or both.

### Direct Action

When the rein stops sliding up the ring, this ring has a direct action. So the same pressure as the rider's hand is applied through the reins and the same pressure is passed forward to the mouthpiece. It doesn't

increase the pressure. Before the reins stops, while sliding, the ring is already gradually passing some pressure to the mouthpiece. However 100% is only reached when the rein stops.

### Slow Signal

This ring is the slowest of probably all the rings when found in a big size (not a bradoon size). One more time it is not a hazard. This ring is usually combined with a snaffle mouthpiece for young or inexperienced horses. The idea is to give a lot of time to the inexperienced horse without any abruptness. That was the idea, now...not sure it is truly understood by all the users.

### The Loose Ring Sleeve:

Downward Effect: **YES**  
Light

Action: **Direct Action**

Signal: **Slow Signal**



**The difference with the loose ring is the sleeve, which at one point will produce a downward effect.** Yes, if you want a loose ring that produces a downward effect this is the one you need. But thinking well...this is not very far from a big D ring. Depending on how long the sleeve is, and if this one is long, it is equivalent or very close to the D ring. With a very short sleeve this will be slower than a D ring and giving less downward effect.

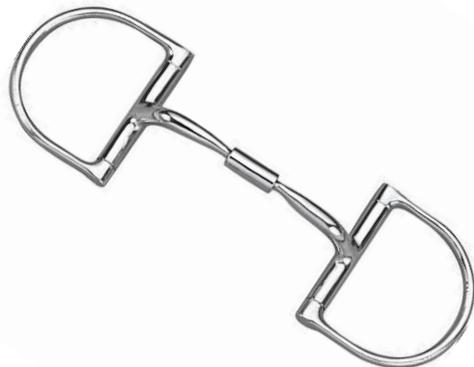
Direct action and slow signal as the regular loose ring.

### The Regular Dee Ring:

Downward Effect: **YES**  
Medium

Action: **Direct Action**

Signal: **Slow Signal**



By regular I mean than the ring doesn't have hooks to fix the reins. See Dee ring with hooks below. **There are two versions of this ring, the English and the western.** The western version is not as rounded and most of the time is smaller than the English D ring. The goal is to be a bit faster than the English version. The rein will reach the point of locking faster, engaging the full potential of the mouthpiece. D Rings are faster than loose rings.

## Downward Effect

When the rein reaches the locking point, the bit will produce the maximum downward effect. To increase the downward effect, the rider could lift his hands or use a Dee Ring with hooks.

## Direct Action

Same as the loose ring. See paragraph above.

## Slow Signal

The western version is not as rounded and most of the time is smaller than the English D ring. The goal is to be a bit quicker in reaching the locking point. But still, it is classified as a slow signal as the rein will still take some time before getting locked.



### The Regular Dee Ring With HOOKS:

Downward Effect: **YES**  
strong

Action: **Leverage Action**

Signal: **Medium Signal**



The idea of a D ring having a hook for the reins is to have the benefits of a regular ring but also a couple of other options.

### Direct Action or Leverage

You can use this bit with one or two sets of reins. With one set of reins you can put the reins on the D bar (not on the hook) so it is like a regular D. But if you put the rein in the hook, this ring will now be transformed in a very

small shank bit. How long is the shank, from the mouthpiece to the bottom of the vertical part of the D? In most of the D rings, this is 1"1/2 or 2". So it is not much, but those couple of small inches are producing leverage now.

But there is more. You can also use two sets of reins. The first one on the D bar and the second one on the hook. This is the same principle as the Pelham.

**Note that under the top hook, there is a little hole. Do you know why?** Its there to put a chin strap or chain. The strap or chain will only make sense if you put the rein on the bottom hook. At that moment you are creating leverage, the strap or the chain if adjusted correctly will give a more **gradual and constant effect on the mouth of the horse**. It will better define the curb pressure created by the leverage. The correct adjustment of the strap or chain is that this one takes contact with the horse's chin when the vertical bar of the D is 45 degrees backward. I like this better than measuring with 1 or 2 fingers etc.

I strongly recommend if you use the hook to use also the chin strap. Without that, the effect of the bit is not constant and horses don't like that.

## Medium Signal

This is faster than the regular D. With the rein in the hook, this is **quite a bit faster than a regular D**. Not as fast a straight shank, but more like a small "S" shank. Due to the shape of the D and where the hook is, the rein needs to move before pulling the hook. So it will absorb some of the mistakes of the hand.

### The Kimberwhick Ring:

Downward Effect: **YES**  
Light (first hook) or strong

Action: Direct Action  
(first hook) or  
**Leverage Action**

Signal: **Medium Signal**



**This Ring comes always with a chain because** when the rein is on the bottom hook it does create **leverage**.

As you can see in the Kimberwhick ring, the vertical bar is longer than in a D, measuring from the mouthpiece. So the Kimberwhick ring has more leverage. This is a little bit longer than most of the D rings.

However **if the rein is connected on the upper hook**, this will be a direct action bit and with a light downward effect of the mouthpiece.

Could also be used with 4 reins.

**Medium Signal** like a D with hook.

## The Full Cheek, Half Cheek, Pelham and similar

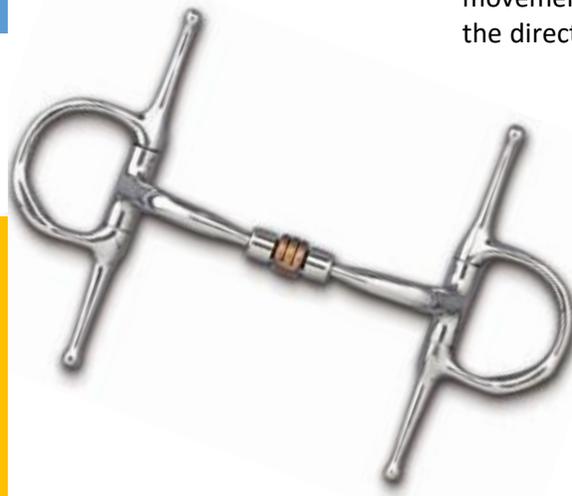
This type of ring is not a 100% ring. However they have a ring that is part of the bit's shank or the ring. So the connection with the rein and the effect on the mouthpiece and in the horse's mouth is similar to a D ring.

## Full Cheek:

Downward Effect: **YES**  
Light

Action: **Direct Action**

Signal: **Slow Signal**



This is basically a D bit, which will just accentuate the side movement, pushing the head of the horse in the direction where the rider is turning. The push is absorbed by the opposite cheek.

Like the regular D, you will find them in a large variety of sizes. You can also find some models with hook too.



## The Half Cheek:

Downward Effect: **YES**  
Light

Action: **Direct Action**

Signal: **Slow Signal**



This is similar to the full cheek ring. But the half cheek will push the head of the horse in the direction where the rider wants to turn.

What I don't like of the full and half cheek because the young horses like to play with the bottom part of the cheek. They find it amusing, grabbing it in their mouth. So to avoid

this problem, some bridles maker have made a special bridle with a small strap keeping the cheek behind the mouth of the horse.

## The Pelham:

Downward Effect: **YES**  
Light (big ring) or strong

Action: Direct  
Action (Big ring) or  
**Leverage Action**

Signal: **Slow Signal**  
(first hook) or  
**Slow Signal**



## This Ring/Shank

could be found with many different sizes of the big ring, different length for the straight shank etc.

This bit is design to be used with one pair of reins on the top ring or on the bottom ring or with 4 reins.

**There are other rings that you also could consider like the Baucher ring, the egg butt ring etc.**

However to resume, if you want to use a ring and not a shank it is because you have a horse in process of training. You want a slow signal to give time to the inexperienced horse to respond without abruptness. You could want to not have any downward effect and use a loose ring or you want to flex the poll of your horse and the D ring with hook could be the best choice. You also want a direct action, no leverage ore eventually almost nothing. No downward effect, slow signal and direct action, basically those are the characteristics of the rings.

**However if you want downward effect, leverage and a much quicker signal you need to consider a shank.** There are many different shanks, each with specifics characteristics of speed, leverage severity etc. As owner or trainer of a horse, you must learn at least a BIT about bits. This is for wellbeing of your horse. I hope you enjoyed this second part. I also hope that you will from now on use the right bit, ring or shank for the job.

As always

Un saludo

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