

Middle California Region USPC
Preparing For Your HB Test
Types and Functions of Bits

**For the HB test, The USPC HB Standard requires that the candidate:
Identify and discuss the three basic bit categories: snaffle, pelham and curb**

Some questions to consider for the HB test:

- Why might a rider choose to use a pelham over a snaffle?
- What are pressure points?
- What kind of action does a snaffle apply?
- Can you identify different material that bits are made of?
- What the difference is between a solid and hollow mouthpiece?
- Can you identify which bit is more severe?
- Can you explain if a twisted mouth piece is gentle or severe?

In general

- the thinner and/or the heavier (solid) the mouthpiece, the sharper the action.
- the wider and lighter (hollow) the mouthpiece; the more gentle the action.
- the conformation of a horse's mouth (structure of jaw & palate, size and strength of tongue, depth or space between upper and lower jaws when mouth is closed), degree or curvature of the mouthpiece, the quality of construction and smoothness of the bit, and the rider's rein aids are the ultimate determinants of the mildness or severity of a bit.

The mouthpieces of bits can be

- straight
- mullen (slightly curved)
- ported (arched in the center)
- round
- square
- triangular
- twisted
- solid
- hollow
- single-jointed
- double-jointed

Materials used include:

- **Rubber:** soft and gentle to the mouth. It should have a nylon strap, not a metal chain running through the center of the bit.
- **Vulcanite:** a hardened rubber often used in mullen mouth bits that is gentle on the mouth.
- **Nylon:** older versions (10 years+) tend to wear rough and can cut horse's mouth. Newer versions are very strong, lightweight, smooth, and gentle on the mouth and have no unpleasant taste.
- **Plastic:** Same attributes as nylon, can also have flavors (example: "Happy Mouth" apple flavor) incorporated into the plastic to make bit more inviting to the horse.
- **Stainless Steel:** does not rust, is very strong, and comes in different weights (hollow or solid) and thicknesses.
- **Copper:** has an unpleasant taste which causes the horse to salivate and chew the bit. This material is illegal to use in Pony Club events.
- **Nickel Silver:** less expensive, but also weaker than stainless steel; it can break, chip, and develop rough edges easily.
- **German silver:** a composition of brass, copper and nickel silver which is intended to stimulate salivation and is generally heavier than other metal bits.
- **Aurigan:** an alloy bit made by Sprenger which is 80% copper and 100% nickel free. It is used in the "KK" line of bits. It has a gold look to it.
- **Leather:** still used to cover some bits, this decreases the severity of the bit, but is easily damaged and has an unpleasant taste.
- **Wood:** quite uncommon. It is fairly gentle, but easily damaged and may develop splinters.

Seven Points of Control (Pressure Points)

1. **Tongue:** Very sensitive area. It takes all or some of the pressure with every form of bit, except perhaps one with a very high and wide port.
2. **Bars:** Fairly sensitive area. All bits apply pressure to the bars.
3. **Lips/Corners:** Very sensitive area. All bits apply pressure to the lips. Also, the lips regulate the height and width of the bit within the mouth.
4. **Poll:** Very sensitive area. It receives pressure when using a curb, pelham, kimberwick or gag bit, also if using an overcheck bit and rein.
5. **Curb Groove:** Fairly sensitive area. Any bit which requires the use of a curb chain or strap (curb, pelham & kimberwick), applies pressure to the curb, groove, and increases the leverage of the bit's shank upon the horse's poll.
6. **Roof of the Mouth:** It is affected by the key (joint) of a single jointed bit, if using a high port, or if using a low port with a low and tightly adjusted cavesson.
7. **Nose:** Quite sensitive area. Any type of noseband will apply some sort of pressure here.

Types of Bits

Snaffle

Can have one or two mouthpieces, and can be straight, jointed (single or double), mullen or ported (ex: ⁿKKⁱ training bit). Depending on the type of snaffle used, this class of bits can apply pressure to the tongue, bars, lips, corner of the mouth, and poll. (Depending upon the source, gag bits, elevator bits and the three ring or European jumping bits may be considered members of the snaffle group. These would be the only snaffles which apply pressure to the poll)

A single-jointed snaffle applies a “nutcracker action” to the tongue. A double-jointed snaffle applies a milder wrap-around action of fairly even pressure to the tongue, although the severity is also affected by the nature of the center portion of the mouthpiece.

A snaffle with two jointed mouthpieces (ex: double-twisted wire), applies two separate “nutcracker actions” in opposite directions. This is a very severe type of bit which may pinch or even cut into the tongue.

Curb

Can have a thick, thin, solid, hollow, straight, mullen or ported mouthpiece, a long or short shank, and should always be used with a curb-chain or curb-strap and a lip-strap. In the Pony Club Manual, the kimberwick is considered a member of the curb type of bit, however, other sources consider it to be better grouped with the pelham bits. The curb applies pressure to the tongue, bars, roof, lips, curb groove and, via the leverage of the shanks, it also affects the poll.

Weymouth: has a long or short cheek (shank), can have a fixed or sliding mouthpiece (the cheeks pass through the mouthpiece), and can have a mullen or ported mouthpiece.

Banbury: the mouthpiece passes through the cheeks, allowing the cheeks to rotate independently of each other. Therefore pressure can be brought to bear on only one side of the mouth. A banbury never has a port.

In general, the longer the shank or cheek, the greater the leverage, and therefore the more potential for harsh action. “Tom Thumb” refers to short cheeks on a curb or a pelham.

Fixed mouthpiece: the action is direct and consistent.

Sliding mouthpiece: the action is less direct and can be inconsistent, however, the sliding mouthpiece allows for a certain freedom of up and down movement.

The object of using a curb with bridoon is to make small, "fine tuning" adjustments.

Pelham

In theory, this is a combination of the curb and the snaffle. However, it does not keep the actions pure and true to those of the curb and snaffle. It consists of one mouthpiece which can be fixed or sliding, straight, mullen, ported or jointed. It also has long or short shanks, and two rings per shank for reins. The pelham can apply pressure to the tongue, bars, lips, roof, curb, groove and the poll. The pelham and the kimberwick are often used by young or inexperienced riders who need the control and leverage of a curb, but who aren't experienced enough to use a double bridle.

The pelham is not recommended for use with young horses as a stepping stone between the snaffle and the double bridle, as it often creates incorrect acceptance of the bit and incorrect head carriage.