

The centuries-long history of racing has produced a rich language to describe the sport and the betting that accompanies it. The vocabulary can seem a little confusing at first, but it's easy to pick up the gist of what is said and newcomers to racing find themselves becoming fluent surprisingly quickly. In fact the English vocabulary owes more than many people realize to the language of the racecourse. You'll notice that there are many phrases which will seem very familiar.

DESCRIBING HORSES

Colt	Male horse, up to the age of four years, which has not yet been "gelded" (castrated).
Dam	The mother of a horse.
Filly	Female horse up to four years of age.
Gelding	A castrated horse.
Juvenile	A two-year-old horse or a three to four year old hurdler.
Maiden	A horse that has never won a race.
Mare	Female horse over five years old.
Sire	The father of a horse.

AT THE COURSE

All Weather Racing	Flat racing on an artificial surface, such as fibresand or polytrack
Amateur (rider)	On racecards, their names are prefixed by Mr, Mrs, Captain, etc, to indicate their amateur status.
Apprentice	A young jockey contracted to a licensed trainer. The rider's contract is renewed annually while they learn the art of flat racing.
Conditional Jockey	The jumping equivalent of an apprentice.
Clerk of the course	The official in charge of a day's horse racing, as well as the provision of the racing surface.
Colours	The cap and silks of the different jockeys, styled differently to help tell them apart. Colours are determined by who owns the horse and each owner has their own distinctive colours.
Connections	A horse's trainer and owners.
Course Specialist	A horse which runs well at a particular track.
Distance	This can refer either to the length of a race, a winning margin of 30 lengths or more (as in "he won by a distance"), or, occasionally, a point 240 yards from the end of the race (something that happens "below the distance" occurs between this point and the end of the race).
Draw	The number of the stall in which a horse is drawn in a flat race. Stall number 1 is always on the left when standing behind the stalls and looking down the course. On courses with long corners, the draw can have quite a big impact on the outcome of the race. Which stalls provide an advantage depends on the exact layout of the course and sometimes on the ground, too. Stalls are not used in jump races.
Furlong	A unit of distance measuring 220 yards, or one eighth of a mile. The shortest races in the UK are over 5 furlongs, or 5f.
Going	Description of the underfoot conditions, which can be characterised as either heavy, soft, good to soft, good, good to firm, or firm.
Judge	The official responsible for declaring the finishing order of a race and the distances between the runners.
Objection	A complaint by one jockey against another regarding a breach of rules during a race.
Paddock	The area of the racecourse where horses parade before a race.
Pattern	A general term for the highest-level races. These are ranked as Group One (the highest level), Group Two or Group Three in flat racing, and as Grades One, Two and Three in jump racing.
Penalty	Weight added to the allotted handicap weight of a horse which has won since the weights were originally published.
Spread a plate	When a horseshoe becomes detached from a hoof.
SP/Starting Price	The official odds of a horse at which bets are settled in the betting shops. The starting price is an estimation of the odds generally available at the moment the race starts. However, if you think that the odds of your horse may shorten, it is possible to 'take the price' (displayed by the bookie) when you place your bet at any stage before the start of a race. Those odds will then be recorded on your ticket and be used to determine how much you will win instead of the SP.
Stewards	The panel responsible for applying the rules of racing; stewards enquiries are held if there are concerns over the conduct of a race including objections.
Tic-tac	The hand signals used by bookmakers to transmit information on the racecourse.
Under starters orders	The horses fall under the jurisdiction of the starter in the moments before the start of the race. As long as a horse is withdrawn before this stage then all bets on that horse are refunded.
Walkover	A race in which there is only one runner.
Weighed in	Jockeys are weighed before and after each race to ensure that their horse has carried the correct weight. The "weighed in" announcement signals that the result is official.