

# Developing Youth through 4-H Horse Project Drill Team

A manual to help you implement a drill team in your county



## What is an Equestrian Drill Team?

"An equestrian drill team is a group of horses and riders performing choreographed maneuvers to music. Teams typically perform at rodeos, horse fairs, parades, benefits, and drill team competitions. Drill teams are intended to entertain, show sportsmanship, horsemanship, teamwork and dedication." ([wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equestrian_drill_team))

## Purpose of this manual

This manual is intended to give you an idea of what is needed to start an equine drill team in your county. There are many great resources online & in print to help you with the technical aspects of setting up a drill team routine. Once your county gets started with drill, your imagination is your only limitation.

*Sherry Zittel*  
*Wisconsin 4-H Horse Association Drill Team Chairperson*

## Why start a 4-H Drill Team?

Equine drill team is a great way to encourage 4-H members to develop their leadership abilities, build character, and experience pride in owning a horse or pony. It provides opportunity to develop creative and technical skills. It promotes social skills and provides an outlet for youth to enter activities with their horse or pony. It offers the opportunity for members to work (and possibly compete) together as a partners to form a team routine. It can teach the horse or pony how to get along with other animals. It is often a “follow the leader” activity and can teach the unruly horse or pony how to pace them self with other animals and music. A well performed drill is not only an educational experience but a self-esteem builder as well!

## What do you need to get started?

You can begin your drill team adventure by putting together a routine on-foot. Work with youth to choose music & a few drill team maneuvers (or a ready-made routine). Walk through the routine on foot (without horses) to get a feel for spacing, transitions between maneuvers & flow with music. All you need for this is:

- Two or more 4-H volunteer horse leaders who want to encourage & promote teamwork and leadership
- Eight or more youth can start a drill team. (Keep in mind – Wisconsin State Fair Champion Challenge Drill Team Competition allows 10 max riders)
- Copies of drill team maneuvers or routines (found online or in print) - *101 Drill Team Exercises for Horse & Rider*, Debbie Sams (optional but highly recommended!)
- Music player & music
- Whistles (optional)

First practice with horses:

- Practice Arena
- Music
- All 4-H required safety equipment (helmets, boots, tack)
- Be prepared with printed drill routines for each rider – too much standing around & youth will lose interest
- Flexibility – not all things work on horses as they did on foot!
- Smiles, laughter & encouragement

Practices that become a fun social gathering as well as an educational and skill building activity will keep your youth coming back for more!

## General Drill Team Information

There are many types of drills. This manual will be based on Freestyle Drills (most of the concepts will carry over to other types of drills).

### *Drill Team Leaders*

- Don't make your drill any more difficult than your weakest horse and rider can handle.
- Value precision over speed. Your drill should be smooth, seamless and look easy.
- Lead riders can give cues using a whistle. With some maneuvers it's a good idea to have the riders in the back give the commands since they can see what is coming up.
- Allow preparation time for your next move, keeping it short enough to keep the drill interesting.
- The drill should contain follow the leader moves between difficult maneuvers to allow riders and horses to take a breath, space themselves and reorganize their thoughts.
- Lead horses are not always in front of the drill routine. Drill team patterns can take many twists and turns which change the horses that are in the front.

### *Drill Team Rider*

- Listen for instructions.
- Do not stop unless the leader tells the whole line to stop.
- Do not pass another rider unless instructed to do so.
- Do not pull out of line unless a collision is imminent; rate your horse, increasing or decreasing your speed as needed.
- If you make a mistake, for instance, turning the wrong way or starting to perform the wrong figure, don't stop unless the mistake has disrupted the movements of others. Catch up or improvise with a new maneuver. Your audience may never suspect the mistake.
- Riders watch their partners' bodies out of the corners of their eyes. Riders should be aligned shoulder to shoulder.
- Smile!

### *Drill Team Horses*

- Biters, kickers, and those horses who dislike being in close proximity to other horses should not be part of a drill team.
- Horses should be matched according to skills; however, sometimes matching the faster horse with a slower horse will speed up the slower horse or slow down the faster horse. Give timid horses more space, if needed.
- A general rule of thumb for distance between horses would be one length at a walk, two lengths at a trot and three lengths at a canter.
- If your horse threatens to kick, drive him forward. Signs that a horse is preparing to kick are swatting his tail up and then straight down, pinning his ears stiffly back, wrinkling his nose and turning his head sideways, raising a hoof in a threatening manner, and slowing down to prepare to kick.
- If your horse shows signs of preparing to bite, such as pinning his ears and baring his teeth, move him away from the other horses by slowing him down or moving farther to the left or right, away from the potential victim.

#### *Drill Team Practices*

- Keep in mind that many youth will lose interest during practices if nothing is started. Be prepared to keep your team active and involved.
- Practice often. The more comfortable the members are with the routine, the more fun they will have with the performance.
- Always practice with your music if possible. This allows the horse and rider to memorize where they should be at any point during the routine.

#### *Drill Team Performance*

- Let the riders know that mistakes during a performance happen. No one in the audience knows your drill and probably will not recognize it. Get back in sync as gracefully as they can.
- The audience appreciates when your drill addresses them. This could be a wave, salute or any other method of acknowledging the audience.
- Strive to use the whole arena; however, the main actions should occur in the center of the arena.
- Be creative! Include a moment of surprise, such as an unusual combination.
- Look for places to perform – local horse shows, parades, your county fair, competitions – It's good to have a place for the team to show-off their hard work.
- Reward performers – let them know their hard work is noticed and appreciated! Some examples would include a ribbon for their stall at County Fair or recognition at the project awards time.

#### **4-H Safety Requirements**

- Always wear a SEI approved safety helmet, long pants, and boots with cut out heels.
- Horses must be appropriately tacked (must not be ridden in a halter).
- No riding bareback or double.
- No stallions permitted.
- Abide by all Wisconsin 4-H Horse Association Safety rules.

#### *Additional Safety Considerations*

- Be aware of the body language of the horses around you. Take proactive measures, such as moving your horse away, when his body language indicates that he is agitated, nervous, or otherwise distracted.
- Be aware of where the other riders are in the arena. This will help keep you safe and give you the ability to perform the drill more accurately.
- Take note of objects or shadows that might cause alarm or spook your horse inside or outside the arena, so that you will not be caught off guard. Remove hazards from arena.
- Make sure all tack is in good repair and properly fitted.

## Skills necessary for successful drill team routine

- Listen – pay attention to leaders.
- Stop your horse!
- Turn/bend your horse.
- Increase / decrease your speed (Rate).
- Pay attention to your horse's attitude and be able to control your horse.
- Be aware of surrounding horse/riders.

These skills will become better developed over practice time. You may be pleasantly surprised at how quickly horses don't even notice what began as spooky objects & events. Practice and repetition are the keys to success.

## Music

Music can heighten the excitement of an already dramatic exercise. It can also make your drill a thing of beauty, helping to make your team appear as a cohesive body. Many types of music can work for your team. Find a theme and use the same type of music throughout the drill. Pick music that you and your horses like. Make sure it doesn't spook them. Think about matching the music to your horses' style or gait. Consider the physical attributes and personalities of the horses in your team and how the tempo relates to them. Music should be suitable to your maneuvers. Be sure that it is also 4-H appropriate in content and not offensive to your audience.

## Attire

Matching attire or costumes add to the attractiveness of the drill team routine. There are several low-cost options available for creating matching attire for your team. Use your imagination to create a look that compliments your performance.

## Youth

- Colored t-shirts or long-sleeved button up shirts
- Helmet covers
- Sashes or belts
- Vests

## Horses

- Ribbons in the mane and/or tail
- Matching leg wraps
- Matching saddle pads or pad covers
- Glitter or painted stencils

Remind youth that they may submit any outfit they sew for judging at their county fair or state expo.

## Food for Thought –

The more you are can involve the youth in creating and choreographing the routine the more successful you are likely to be. You can even involve youth who do not have a horse (or one suited to drill team) by having them help “coach” on the ground. You will also need someone to man the music player and possibly make tweaks to the music selections. You can have someone video practices so the team can see what is working and what needs work. – Be very careful to make this a positive exercise, not just an opportunity to point out faults. Spend time building on what is working! There are many other opportunities to involve both youth & parents in drill team events and practice – costumes, documenting patterns, decorating horses for performances, setting up a team meal... think about the possibilities!

## References

### *Web Links*

University of Minnesota 4-H Drill Team documents

<https://sites.google.com/umn.edu/4-h-horse-project/opportunities/drill-team>

Kettle Moraine Rough Riders Competition:

[http://www.kmrr.com/kmrr\\_competition.html](http://www.kmrr.com/kmrr_competition.html)

Door County Fair Competition:

[http://www.stockhorseofwisconsin.com/Drill\\_Team.html](http://www.stockhorseofwisconsin.com/Drill_Team.html)

Walworth County Fair – Timmerman’s Ranch Dances with Horses Competition

<https://www.timmermannsranch.com/timmermanns-teams/drill-teams/dances-with-horses-drill-team-competition>

### *Publications*

*101 Drill Team Exercises for Horse & Rider, Debbie Sams*

## Sample Pattern Work Sheet

		<b>Notes:</b>

Music Suggestions:

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## Freestyle Drill – Sample Score Card

### Wisconsin State Fair Champion Challenge Drill Team Competition Score Card – Freestyle Drill

County \_\_\_\_\_ Team # \_\_\_\_\_ Begin Time \_\_\_\_\_ End Time \_\_\_\_\_

Category	Judging Info	Points	Comments
<b>Execution</b>			
Spacing	Horse spacing consistent	Max 30 pts	
Alignment	Lines should be straight. Circles should be evenly round and centered	Max 30 pts	
Timing/Coordination	Team members work well together. Moving as a unit.	Max 30 pts	
<b>Performance</b>			
Manners of Horses	Good manners – no kicking, biting, bucking, rearing.	Max 10 pts	
Horsemanship	Riders show good horsemanship	Max 15 pts	
Originality/Variety	Original drill with varied maneuvers & patterns	Max 10 pts	
Attractiveness of Patterns	Symmetry, definition & flow of transitions	Max 15 pts	
<b>Difficulty</b>			
Precision/Briskness	Precise movements & transitions – not sloppy/broken gaits	Max 15 pts	
Degree of Difficulty	Closeness of horses, difficulty of maneuver, speed	Max 25 pts	
General Impression	Horses & equipment clean? Coordinated & appealing?	Max 10 pts	
Crowd Appeal	Does the crowd react to the team? Exciting to watch? Is the routine creative?	Max 10 pts	
<b>Faults/Penalties</b>			
Broken/Dropped tack/equipment	Broken/dropped tack or décor	Max -5 pts	
Collision	Horse & riders collide	Max -15 pts	
Fall	Horse &/or rider falls	Max -10 pts	
Doesn't meet time requirement -	Under 8 min or over 12 min	-3 /minute	
Music Timing	Music ends before/after drill	-3	
Regroup	Team stops to regroup	-10	
Point totals:			Max 200 points

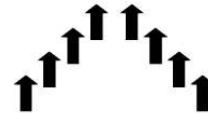


## Sample Drill Team Maneuvers

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### Chevron or Wedge

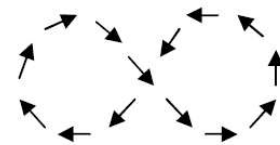
Any number of riders form a moving point or wedge. One or two riders may lead and spacing should be consistent with an oblique.



### Figure Eight

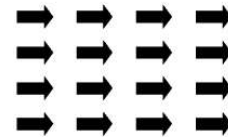
Riders form two different circles which connect but don't overlap. Riders change circles every revolution.

*Variations: single file, 2s, etc.*



### Column of Fours

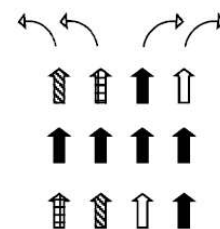
A column of fours, side by side, with equal distance between each rider maintaining the same track.



### Column Roll Back

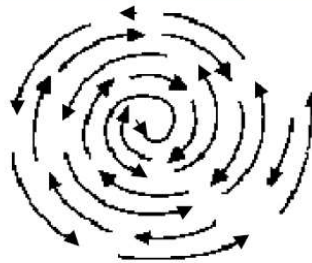
Outside riders at the front of a column circle outwards to the rear of the column. The adjacent riders immediately follow and end up reversing positions with the first riders. The next set repeats the roll.

*Variations: Number of riders per set. Number of riders per roll back (roll back by pairs don't reverse positions).*



## Spiral or Peel the Apple

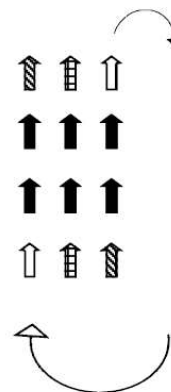
A single file line formed into one large circle. The lead rider gradually moves to the center of the circle essentially decreasing the size. Once near the center, the lead rider reverses the direction of the circle and passes the following riders on the outside. Spacing between riders should be consistent.



## Posse Roll

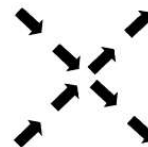
Sets of riders at the front of the column circle or roll back independently to the end of the column. Prior to falling in place at the end of the line, riders reverse order. The next set follows the first.

*Variations: Number of riders in the set, number of sets, and distance between sets.*



## Single File Cross

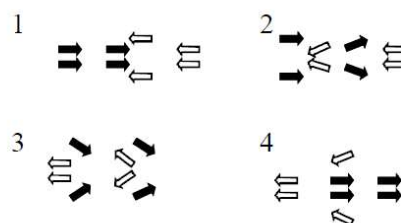
Single file lines crossing ahead of or behind each on-coming rider. Riders may approach from any angle.



## Basket Weave

Columns approach from opposite directions and weave back and forth by passing thru each other. One column separates while the other column rides thru and then vise-versa until all sets have passed.

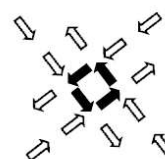
*Variations: Varying number per column.*



## Box Cross

Four columns of one or more riders cross directly behind the rider(s) in front of them forming a box.

*Variations: Single file, 2s, 4s, etc.*



## Charro

A column of riders is passed through by another set of riders.

*Variations: Number of riders in the column and number of riders in the set.*



## Single File Line or Column of Ones

A single file line of riders with equal distance between each rider maintaining the same track.



## Column of Twos or Pairs

A column of pairs, side by side, with equal distance between each rider maintaining the same track.



## Column of Threes

A column of threes, side by side, with equal distance between each rider maintaining the same track.



## Company Front or Single Line Abreast

Each rider, side by side, moving in the same direction .



## Crack the Whip

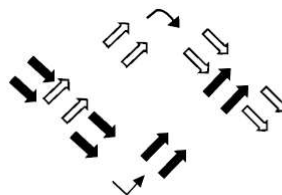
Riders in a single line abreast circle in one direction as a unit using one side of the line as a pivot point.

*Variations: Number of riders*



## Diamond Cross

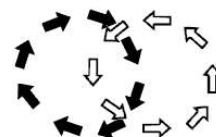
Two lines, crossing ahead of or behind each on-coming set of rider(s), proceed to a certain point, then turn 45 degrees to cross again. Variations: Single file, 2s, 4s, etc. and approach from various directions.



## Double Wedding Ring

Riders in two independent interlocking circles both circling in opposite directions. Riders do not change circles.

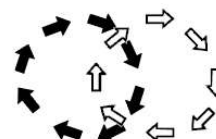
*Variations: Number of riders abreast*



## Egg Beater

Riders in two independent interlocking circles both circling in the same direction. Riders do not change circles.

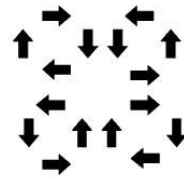
*Variations: Number of riders abreast*



## Four Leaf Clover

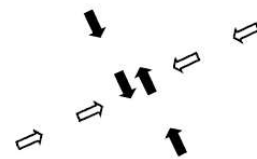
Riders in four closed plane curves equal distance from a fixed point.

*Variations: single file, 2s, etc; interlocking, meshing, with a box cross.*



## Four Way Cross

Four columns cross alternately. One set from two opposite columns pass by each other then one set from the two remaining columns pass each other behind the set from the other columns crossing alternately until all sets have crossed. This is not a Box Cross.

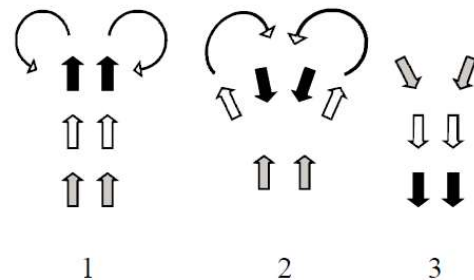


*Variations: single file, 2s, etc.*

## Heart

The first set in a column separate and form a set in the reverse direction. The remaining sets separate and ride outside of the first set then turn in and form sets following the first set.

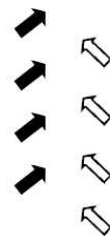
*Variations: Number of riders per set.*



## Herringbone or 45 Degree Ride Through

Two lines of riders canted at 45 degrees ride through a similar line traveling the opposite direction.

*Variations: Number of riders per set and number of lines.*

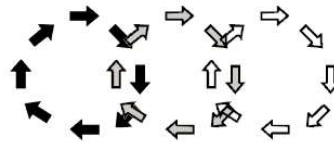




## Interlocking Circles

Multiple circles overlapping or interlocking.

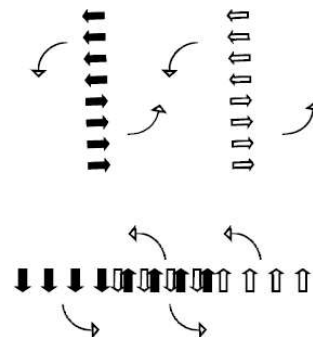
*Variations: Number of circles and riders per set.*



## Interlocking Fan

Two pinwheels, with distance between each rider, circle in the same direction. Half of each pinwheel will cross with the other pinwheel momentarily forming a single line abreast. During the cross, inside riders are alternately facing opposite directions and outside riders remain in the same direction.

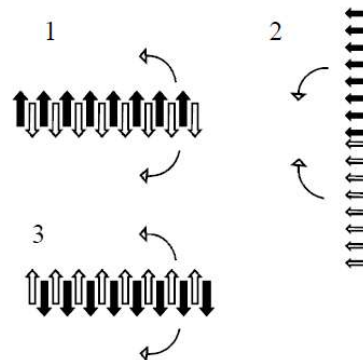
*Variations: Number of riders in pinwheel*



## Itsy Bitsy Spider

Two lines abreast, facing opposite directions, mesh together. The end riders on the same end of each line begin opposite circles. The lines complete 180° turns and come back to form one line. The pivot riders now become swing riders and begin circles in the other direction. A minimum of two 180° turns is required.

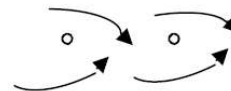
*Variations: Number of riders in each line*



## Lace the Boot

Two lines traveling in the same direction weave through each other around an imaginary point.

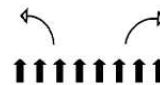
*Variations: Single file, 2s, 3s, etc.*



## Liberty Gate or Donut

A single line abreast splits in half with each newly formed set circling away from the other. The riders which were on the ends of the original line become pivots for their respective sets. Each set must complete a 360° turn at the least.

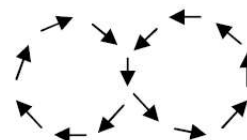
*Variations: Number of riders*



## Mock Figure Eight

Riders form two different circles which connect but don't overlap. Riders do NOT change circles.

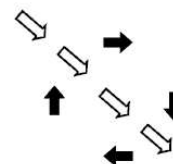
*Variations: single file, 2s, etc.*



## Null & Void

Independent circle(s) crossed by a column(s) passing in front of or behind each approaching rider.

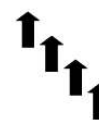
*Variations: single or multiple columns, multiple circles, 2s, etc.*



## Oblique

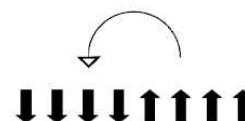
Two or more riders with diagonal spacing. Lateral alignment may be from nose to knee or nose to hip.

*Variations: 2s, 4s, 6s, etc.*



## Pinwheel or Single Spoke

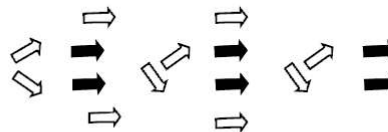
Two columns of riders in a closed plane curve with every set of riders equal distance from a fixed center point. *Variations: Singles, 2s, 4s, & 8s.*



## Pole Bend

Columns of riders stand stationary as another column of pairs weave through the stationary pairs.

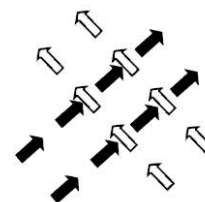
*Variations: Number of riders in the stationary sets, number of riders in weaving sets, and stationary sets spread apart.*



## Split or Double Thread

Columns of twos or pairs separated by a fixed distance cross with another column separated in the same fashion.

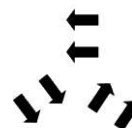
*Variations: Two or four separated columns.*



## Spoke

Two or more sets of riders in a closed plain curve traveling in the same direction with every set of riders equal distance from each other and equal distance from a fixed center.

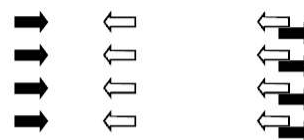
*Variations: number of sets, number of riders per set.*



## Suicide Charge

Two lines of riders abreast approach and pass thru each other. Lateral spacing between riders may vary.

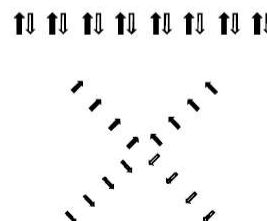
*Variations: Multiple lines.*



## Suicide Wheel

Riders in one line, alternately facing opposite directions, move forward into two distinct pinwheels with the four inside riders acting as pivots. These pinwheels will move in opposite directions with distance between each rider and cross thru each other at two points in the circle.

*Variations: 2s, 4s, etc.*

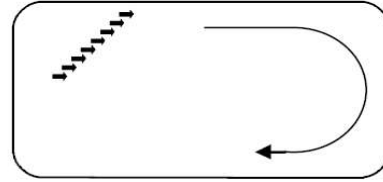




## Sweep

Riders in an oblique traveling the perimeter of the arena. Riders must travel a distance equal to or greater than half the circumference of the arena.

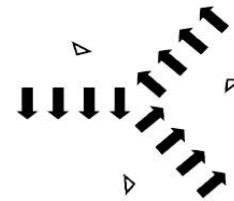
*Variations: Number of riders*



## Three Spoke

Three columns of riders in a closed plane curve with every set of riders equal distance from a fixed center point and from each other.

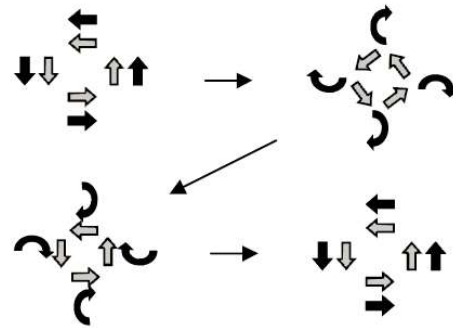
*Variations: Singles, 2s, 4s, & 8s.*



## Tornado

Four sets form a box cross. The outside riders from each set independently circle out and the inside riders circle in forming one circle. The riders then form back up with their original set and complete the box cross.

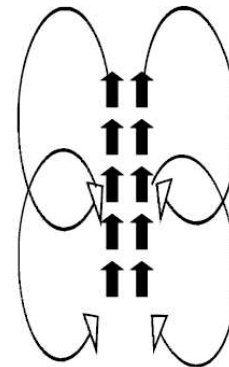
*Variations: Number of riders in sets.*



## Touch and Go

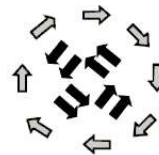
The front set of riders in a column split and circle back. They briefly form up with a middle set in the column and then circle back to form up the original set at the end of the column.

*Variations: Number of riders per set.*



## Wagon Wheel

Two or more sets of riders in a closed plain curve traveling in the same direction with every set of riders equal distance from each other, equal distance from a fixed center, and a separate circle of riders outside of the spoke traveling any direction.



*Variations: Number of spokes, riders in sets.*

## Weave

Two columns of riders approach from opposite directions and weave through each other.

*Variations: Single file, 2s, 4s, & multiple columns from both directions.*



## Zipper

Riders form one stationary line, alternately facing opposite directions. The two end riders on the same end move forward and complete a 270° turn to pair up and travel thru the remaining riders. Remaining riders will follow the original two riders.

*Variations: Riders from the near or far end of the beginning of the zipper may start the process.*

